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THE TIGER TAMER; or, THE LEAGUE OF THE JUNGLE.

BY CAPTAIN FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "THE LOST CAPTAIN," "THE SWORD HUNTERS," "THE DUMB PAGE," "LANCE AND LASSO," ETC., ETC.



THE TIGER TAMER ENTERED THE ARENA WITH A BOUND, JUST AS THE TIGER CROUCHED TO SPRING AT THE RAJAH.

The Tiger Tamer;

OR,

The League of the Jungle.

A TALE OF INDIA.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE BOY BEDOUINS," "THE LOST
CAPTAIN," "THE SEA CAT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE KING OF THE JUNGLE.

THE city of Jagpore was full of excitement, and the people were crowding to the show given them by the Rajah Ram Sing.* All round the inclosure of the amphitheater men and women were packed in row on row under the awnings, looking down to see the wild beasts fight. The Rajah himself, a fat, sensual-looking personage, blazng with jewels and surrounded by the high officers of his court, sat in the royal box, and had been pleased to express his approval by a nod, when the rhinoceros killed the elephant.

Now, however, a hush came on all the spectators, for it was known that the great attraction of the day was coming. Even the Rajah raised himself till he sat nearly upright in his chair, and deigned to inquire of the vizier, Khoda Khan:

"Who is this fellow that is coming?"

"Light of the world," answered the obsequious minister, "he is said to be the greatest tiger-tamer in Hindostan; a man who goes into the jungle alone and captures wild tigers single-handed. He is come to us from the city of Delhi, and is said to be as proud as a rajah. He calls himself indeed the King of the Jungle."

"Ha!" said the great man, lazily; "we will see what he can do, Khoda."

The vizier bowed lower than before, and fidgeted about, as if he wanted to say something. The Rajah observed it, and asked:

"Well, Khoda, do you know anything more about this great tiger-tamer?"

"Resplendency of all glory," replied the vizier, with another salaam, "it is said that the man is a magician who has dealings with the Evil One himself, by which he has power over the beasts of the jungle, and all say that he has the evil eye."

This time the great chief sat bolt upright and opened his own eyes wide.

"By the beard of the great Mogul," he exclaimed, angrily, "if that be so, we will soon prove him. Let him come in at once."

The vizier, a tall, thin man, with an evil-looking face, salaamed once more, and gave a signal. Instantly the cymbals and trumpets sounded, a door at the end of the arena was opened, and into the inclosure bounded a huge tigress, with a collar round her neck, graceful and brilliant, lashing her sides with her tail.

The people gave a great shout of admiration and excitement, for they had never before seen such a magnificent creature issue from a cage. The great size and brilliant markings showed that she was full grown, and the muscular limbs, shining in the sun, told of perfect health and strength. There stood the tigress a moment, as if astonished by the sudden clamor, slowly waving her tail from side to side and peering at the audience; then, with a rapid, sinuous motion, the great beast crept across the arena, and coming to the foot of the palisades, ran round, looking eagerly up at the people and uttering low growls, as if longing to be among them.

So terrible was this eager, hungry look, that a dead stillness fell on all the audience, and even the fat, sensual Rajah stirred uneasily in his chair. The palisades were high enough to stop the spring of any ordinary tiger, and made of hard, slippery bamboo, so that climbing up seemed out of the question; nevertheless every one seemed to be afraid as this gold-and-black-striped monster crept round and round, looking for an opening; and the stillness was universal.

Presently the tigress halted right in front of the box of the great Ram Sing himself; and the Rajah so far forgot his dignity that he turned pale under his olive skin. The creature crouched down, with great green eyes fixed hungrily on the fat body of the prince, and crept back, lashing her tail slowly from side to side, as if to gain distance for a spring, for she

began to quiver from side to side, just as a cat might do, watching for a mouse.

The Rajah Ram Sing sat like a statue, his eyes fixed on those of the tigress, his face of a gray pallor, while the sweat stood out on his forehead in beads. There in the midst of all his power, with courtiers and guards round him, swords and spears on every side, jewels, satins, gold and velvet blazing on the sight, the king of the city and the queen of the jungle looked each other in the eye and the Rajah quailed before the royal beast.

But he was not alone in his terror, for all near him were still as death, and the bravest of his swordsmen shook with fear. Then the tigress uttered a low hungry growl, and the next moment leaped full at the royal box.

Well was it for the Rajah Ram Sing on that day that the palisades on his side of the arena were taller than elsewhere, for the bound of the tigress nearly carried it to the top, and the great brute spread out her fearful talons with such force that they pierced the hard polished shells of the bamboo palings, and she actually hung there a moment, looking over the top, within three feet of the sacred person of the Rajah.

A shrill scream of terror burst from all the populace, and the guards of the prince shrunk back with loud yells, while Khoda Khan crouched trembling behind the chair of his master, as the fat Rajah fell back, limp and helpless, his eyes glaring with a horrible fascination, as they had from the first, into those of the tigress.

Then followed a long pause of intense anxiety, the animal retaining its grasp with desperate tenacity, turning its head from side to side and growling hungrily, amid a dead stillness.

The silence was suddenly interrupted by a young man in the Rajah's box, in white clothes of European cut. His white face, light hair, tawny mustache and blue eyes, contrasted strongly with the bronzed skins of the Hindoos and Mahomedans around him, and his courage seemed no less different, for he arose coolly, smoking a cheroot, made two steps down, beside the Rajah and faced the tiger boldly, raising a bamboo cane as if he intended to strike the beast.

However, he refrained from the blow, for he saw that the great claws were slowly relaxing their hold and that the creature was about to drop, which, sure enough, it did in another moment, and resumed its hungry round of the arena, growling in the same tones of ferocity.

But in the mean time the people and guards were beginning to recover from their first stupor of terror, encouraged by the coolness of the "Burra Sahib," or "great gentleman," as they called the white man by the Rajah's chair.

When he called for a sword, a dozen men ran forward, armed with round shields of rhinoceros hide and curved "tulwars" or swords, sharp as razors. They were the Rajah's professional sword-players, men so expert with their keen weapons that they can cut a lemon in half lying on the bare palm of a man's hand without so much as scratching the skin, while they can sever the head of a bull buffalo from its body at a single blow. These fellows began to feel ashamed of their cowardice, and came in front of the Rajah's box, offering to strike at the animal's paws if it leaped up again. But the white stranger waved them back.

"Give me a sword," he said. "You fellows are more in the way than anything. I can take care of his Highness."

"Go away, dogs," observed the Rajah, himself, in the tone of a surly despot as he was. "The Major Sahib is worth all the rest of you. Give him a sword."

The mortified professionals retired in silence, and Khoda Khan drew his own Damascus scimitar, which he handed to the young man, just as the tigress came creeping along again, and crouched once more before the Rajah's box.

But the animal was never destined to make its second spring. Just as it was lashing its tail more and more rapidly and settling into position, a second figure bounded into the arena, a man of great height and framed like a Hercules, whose swelling muscles were plainly revealed by his scanty dress. His face was one of great beauty, with black lustrous eyes, regular features, a clear olive complexion, and a long silky black mustache falling each side of a shaven chin, while the black curls of his hair touched his shoulders, confined by a gold band ornamented with a tall white plume. His magnificent bust was only half-concealed by a short sleeveless jacket of cloth-of-gold, that glittered

with every motion of his body, while the short drawers of the same material that he wore around his loins constituted his only other covering. Arms and legs, brawny and bare, were ornamented with bracelets and anklets that flashed with jewels as bright as those of the Maharajah himself, and he bore in his hand a heavy whip of rhinoceros hide, with a handle of gold crusted with jewels.

This brilliant and startling figure entered the arena with a bound, just as the tiger crouched to spring at the Rajah for the second time; then, quick as a flash, the new-comer ran across the inclosure to the beast and struck it with his whip a blow that resounded throughout the place.

Startled by the sudden assault, for the tamer had run as silently as a cat, the tigress uttered a roar of terror and fled away to the palings, crouching there, no longer as if ferocious, but evidently frightened to death.

Then it was that a tremendous shout of applause rent the air, and voices began to cry:

"Well done, Govinda, King of the Jungle!"

The tiger-tamer stood in the midst of the arena with a proud smile on his face, listening to the plaudits; and then, fixing his eyes on the Rajah, he salaamed with a profound obeisance. The great man, whose nerves had not yet recovered their equanimity, looked angrily at him, and did not give any encouraging nod of reply; but Major Charlton, the young stranger who had shown so much courage, spoke aloud to himself in his own tongue:

"By Jove, that's the handsomest fellow I've seen since I came to India."

The Rajah heard him; for, like most high caste Hindoos, he understood English, and replied:

"Sahib, dat man is magician and has evil eye. His tiger near kill me. I punish him."

Charlton turned and stared at the Hindoo prince for a moment, but he said not a word; for he had been long enough in India to know that it was useless to argue with a native dignitary against cruelty. He quietly returned the scimitar of Khoda Khan to the vizier, went back to the seat from whence he had stepped to the rescue of the Rajah, and watched the further doings of the tiger-tamer.

The great Govinda looked straight at the Rajah as soon as the brief colloquy with Charlton was over, and salaamed a second time. A second time the salute was unacknowledged, and a cold cruel smile gathered on the lips of Khoda Khan as he looked down.

Then the tiger-tamer, with a proud, angry look, as if he were the equal of any prince in the world, turned away, walked to the middle of the arena, and held up his whip to his tigress calling out:

"Here, Seevah, here!"

The great brute, lately so ferocious, cowered down under the palings and hesitated to move, as if afraid.

"Here, I say!" cried the tamer, sharply, and as he did so he cracked his whip and gave a stamp.

Instantly the tigress began to creep slowly toward him, flat against the ground, as in mortal terror, till her master threw the whip down before her and snapped his fingers, saying in a kinder tone:

"Bring it, Seevah, bring it, good girl!"

The burst of applause that followed, as the huge beast obediently picked up the whip, and then, as if reassured, rose up and walked gravely to her master, was genuine and well-deserved. The tigress seemed to be completely transformed, as she stood by the tamer's side, holding the whip in her mouth, rubbing her arched back against Govinda, and slowly waving her tail like a pet cat, while the man patted her head.

Then Govinda took the whip from the animal and walked right up in front of the royal box, where he spoke in a low tone to his grim charge.

Instantly Seevah began to crouch and growl as before, while the tamer made his third obeisance. This time the Rajah hastily answered it, and a proud smile of triumph crossed the tamer's countenance. He spoke once more to the tigress and turned away, when the animal at once ceased her threatening demonstrations and followed him. Govinda raised his whip in the air, and the tigress leaped over it, with the docility of a dog, again and again. Helay down on his back in the sand, and the tigress picked him up by the waistband and carried him round the arena, amid the cheers of the multitude.

Then came the most wonderful feat of all, which brought even from Major Charlton a cry of surprise, although that gentleman had seen almost everything to be seen in a voyage round the world.

* Indian Princes are variously called Rajahs and Nawaubs, corrupted into Nabobs. The loftiest title is that of Maha-Rajah, or "Rajah of Rajahs." Ram is the Hindoo word for Lord, and is found in most Indian titles, as also Sing or Lion, which is very common.

Govinda stood in the midst of the arena and called out:

"Ali! Ali! Hither, child! Seevah is hungry!"

Then into the arena gravely walked a beautiful little boy, very nearly white, as young children often are in India. This little fellow did not seem to be over five or six years old; and his big black eyes, long dark curls, and beautiful face, was set off by a dress similar to that of the tiger-tamer. Small as he was, this midget carried on his head a great silver dish longer than himself, and the plate was heaped with pieces of meat smothered in boiled rice.*

The beautiful child walked gravely across the arena past the tigress, who stood in the center beside Govinda.

When he neared the animal, Seevah began to roar loudly with eagerness, but did not offer to touch either child or meat, though her tail lashed violently.

The child went to the front of the Rajah's box, laid his load on the ground, and gravely executed a deep obeisance. Even the sullen prince could not withstand the spell of the child's artless grace and beauty, and he eagerly leaned forward, saying:

"Well done! Well done, by the beard of the great Mogul!"

As he spoke, he hastily took off one of his jeweled bracelets and threw it down to the child.

Little Ali picked it up, salaamed profoundly a second time, and then raised his dish and approached the tiger.

A moment later, Seevah was taking food from the child's hand as gently as a trained cat, without so much as a growl, while little Ali occasionally reproved his charge for eagerness by slapping the creature's face with a tiny hand.

Cheer after cheer went up from the arena at the sight, and even the Rajah smiled, while Major Charlton was enthusiastic. At last the plate was empty, and the child picked it up and gave it to the tigress, who took it in her strong jaws, the trainer standing silently by with folded arms all the while, and not even speaking to his beast.

Then, when it seemed as if nothing further could be done to prove the complete control of master over brute, the child slapped the tigress on the side and said something which the spectators could not catch.

Instantly, Seevah lay down, and the little one grappled her brawny neck in the loose folds of skin with two tiny hands, clambering up on the animal's back.

Then up rose Seevah, guided by the child slapping her mighty jaws, and walked to the Rajah's box for the last time, no longer to threaten. Little Ali kissed his hand to the Prince, who returned the salute with perfect enthusiasm, throwing the child a second bracelet. Instantly, the tigress, without any signal, lay down, and allowed the child to dismount, pick up the bracelet and resume his seat in triumph.

Then out of the arena marched the terrible beast, with slow, stately steps, proudly waving her tail, till the dark entrance of the cage hid child and tiger together.

Not till then did the great tiger-tamer advance to make his parting salaam, and this time it was graciously returned by the Rajah, who remarked:

"Magician or not, 'tis a grand tamer."

Then Govinda retired slowly from the arena.

CHAPTER II.

THE LEAGUE OF THE STRANGLERS.

OUTSIDE of the city of Jagpore, on that same night, the full moon looked silently down on a vast expanse of forest and jungle, hemming in the cultivated fields that surrounded the walls of the town. Away out in the midst of the jungle, several miles from the city, stretched one of those huge tanks or reservoirs, over a mile square, which had been erected in the days of the Moguls. It had long since fallen into ruins, and most of its waters had escaped,

* The means by which tigers are retained in perfect docility in some parts of India is very simple and not practiced by the wild beast tamers of civilized countries. It consists in bringing up the creature from a cub on boiled rice and buffalo butter, with a little boiled meat, never allowing it to taste raw flesh. Indian travelers relate that it is quite common for the *fakirs*, or begging priests of India, to keep such tame tigers and be followed by them to the villages in their begging trips, the beast never being either chained or caged. This is a different method altogether from that employed in subduing wild tigers, described in subsequent chapters.—Ed.

the only remnant being a small pond in the midst of a plain of tall grass, where the wild beasts came to drink.

Tigers and leopards, wolves and jackals, were plentiful in the jungle all round this ancient tank, and it was rarely visited save by the shekarrees or native hunters, and by them only in the daytime, for the place was supposed to be haunted by evil spirits as well as fierce beasts.

Nevertheless, on the night of the day on which the tiger-tamer had appeared in the Jagpore amphitheater, the forms of men were to be seen threading the jungle toward the lonely pond, coming from different quarters, but all going to the same point, where a little tent stood in the midst of the plain by the pond, an evident place of rendezvous for the silent midnight wanderers in the jungle.

Within the tent sat an old man, with a long white beard—a person of venerable and benevolent appearance, in the robes of a professional teacher, called a *moonshee*. This old man did not seem to be at all afraid at his solitary position in the jungle, though the distant roaring of tigers was by no means unfrequent. He sat cross-legged on the ground before a square pit dug in the midst of the tent, in the bottom of which stood a lamp of peculiar form. It was a coconut shell filled with oil, in which rested two wicks, lighted at both ends and arranged in a cross so as to give four lights.

The watcher sat motionless before this lamp, with his eyes fixed on the intersection of the cross, and muttered to himself rapidly certain prayers in which the names of "*Kalee! Kalee! Calcutta Walee!*" were frequently repeated. Presently the midnight wanderers began to drop in, and each as he entered squatted before the lamp in the pit, and sat staring at it, mumbling his weird invocations to Kalee, till seven men were thus gathered.

They seemed to be of all ranks in society, for the gleaming mail and helmet of the soldier, the gold and velvet of the courtier, the simple white robe of the moonshee, and the bare brown skin and dirty waist-cloth of the bullock driver, were to be seen in that circle, in apparent equality, muttering prayers to the goddess of war and pestilence, the terrible Kalee, whose temple stands in Calcutta.

"Oh! Kalee! Great Kalee! Lady of Calcutta! Grant us thy help to-night, and give us a sign, whether we shall prosper on our undertaking or not!"

So ran the burden of the prayer, as they sat round the four lights, and then the old man, who seemed to be chief among them, rose and held up his hand, when all were silent.

"Are we all here?" he asked.

"All but the pupil," answered a tall, thin man in rich garments, whose keen, malicious face was very like that of Khoda Khan, the Rajah's minister. "She will come with the sacrifice. Hark!"

As he spoke, a soft rustling in the grass outside was heard, and the figure of a woman, richly dressed, with her head swathed in a thick veil, entered the tent, leading by a cord two black goats, without a speck of white on their bodies or limbs.

Immediately every man in the tent was on his feet amid a solemn silence. The muttering of prayers ceased, and all directions were given by signs. The veiled woman turned the heads of the goats toward the square pit, within which the mystic lamp was burning, and the whole party watched them intently, when it was seen that they must have both recently come out of the water, for they were dripping wet. It seemed but a trivial circumstance, but every one in the tent stood staring at the two animals, as if much depended on their behavior. Presently one of the goats shook off the water in a shower of spray, and a deep sigh of relief burst from every human being in the circle. The old man motioned to the soldier, who handed him his razor-like tulwar or sword; and a moment later the animals' heads were drawn forward, and they were neatly beheaded, the blood being carefully caught in the pit, where it collected around the shell of the mystic lamp.

Then it was that the silence was first broken by the old priest, who said:

"The goddess accepts the sacrifice and tells us to go forth and kill more Brethren; the great Kalee is hungry and needs sacrifices of men. Who is there that has any victims to offer?"

The thin man in rich garments spoke first:

"I have one, the white stranger who is captain of the guards of the Rajah of Jagpore. He rides out alone in the jungle, and he is young. He carries all his wealth with him in jewels, hidden away."

"But he is a Frank," objected the old man. "The goddess would not that we kill Franks, for the great queen beyond the seas knows her subjects, and we cannot sacrifice them without being found out."

This man comes from another country, called America, where they have no king, and no one to look after their people," replied the thin man, eagerly. "He carries a lac* of rupees in jewels."

A grunt of approval came from the circle, and the old man bowed his head, and said, slowly:

"The goddess will accept him. He shall die. Who is the next?"

"The next," said the voice of the veiled woman, "is the tiger-tamer, Govinda."

There was an evident sensation at this name, for every one in the circle started and looked frightened.

"Who shall be his executioner?" at length demanded the chief, solemnly.

"I claim the office," answered the muffled tones from behind the veil; "for I alone can kill the man."

"It may not be," said the old priest, decidedly. "The man is known to all our brotherhood, but we have never yet tried him but we have failed. The sacred mattock has broken and the holy handkerchief has fallen from his face, for the great goddess Kalee is his protector."

"Nevertheless," persisted the voice of the veiled woman, "I demand the office of the slayer for him."

"Hast thou yet slain a man?" inquired the deep tones of the priest, solemnly.

"I have not, but my father was the first strangler of his day," responded the veiled one, boldly. "He was the man who pulled down the Rajah of Benares from his horse, single-handed, in the jungle, and he it was who first made me drink of the terrible *goor*."

As the woman pronounced the last words, she shuddered violently, and the assertion seemed to produce a profound impression on her hearers.

"If she has drunken of the mystic *goor*, the goddess has claimed her for her own," said the thin man, his face working nervously.

"Let her be tried on the Major Sahib," growled the soldier. "He will be an easy prey to a woman, and she will gain experience."

"And why do you wish to be the executioner of Govinda?" asked the white-bearded priest, after a pause.

Clear and hard came the answer, in low, intense tones:

"He killed my father. The goddess has given him to me."

"Be it so," said the old man, reverently bowing his head. "Let the omens decide it. To work with the victims."

He produced from under his long robe a small implement resembling a mattock in shape, and gave it to the thin man to hold. Then he removed the mystic lamp from the pit, and cast in the carcasses of the two animals, in dead silence, when the thin man proceeded to fill up the pit with the mattock, in the same solemn manner as that observed at the sacrifice. When the earth was completely smoothed down, the occupants of the tent passed over it in a measured, rhythmic sort of dance, chanting a low song to Kalee; the veiled woman alone remaining motionless.

Then, on a sudden, the light was blown out, and the whole party rushed out of the tent into the open moonlight, where they began to cry out to Kalee once more, till they had called thrice.

After that, every one stood stock-still for a short time, facing the moon and intently listening for a sound in the silent jungle. Presently it came.

Far off to the left in the jungle sounded the loud roar of a tiger, and the silent circle was apparently agitated by emotions of great anxiety, the veiled woman in particular trembling violently. Almost immediately the roar was answered from the opposite quarter, and the watchers fell on their knees in the moonlight and poured forth low but rapid prayers to the terrible goddess, their faces glowing with fanatical enthusiasm and joy.

While they were still kneeling, the old man rose and spoke aloud in a measured, solemn voice:

"The goddess is propitious at last, and the victims will be sacrificed. The first will be the white soldier that they call the Major Sahib, and the one to slay him is here."

* The rupee is the current coin of India, worth about sixty cents American. A lac is a hundred thousand rupees, worth sixty thousand dollars.

As he spoke, he laid his hand on the head of the veiled woman kneeling beside him.

"I myself will be with thee, oh daughter of the stranger," he continued. "Behold the sacred *goor chat*."

He took from his breast a narrow scarf of silk, doubled to a length of about two feet, and knotted in a peculiar way. "I will be thy holder of hands, and Khoda shall carry the holy mattock," he concluded, "the *kussee* given by the goddess Kalee to dig the graves of the victims. The others shall attend thee, and Kalee shall prosper the sacrifice. When the soldier is slain, Govinda shall follow, for the goddess has said it. Disperse!"

Without another word, he strode away, and one by one the silent figures arose and stole after him through the jungle in the direction of Jagpore.

As they did so, a man who had been lying hidden in the grass behind the tent rose to his feet and watched them, muttering:

"The omens have deceived ye, for I have seen the victims."*

Then Govinda, the tiger-tamer, followed the trail toward Jagpore.

CHAPTER III.

THE RAJAH RAM SING.

THE Rajah had finished his dinner and was enjoying himself with his ministers and guests in his palace. Everything that wealth and barbaric magnificence could supply to please the senses was around him. He lay on pillows of cloth-of-gold, his fat body robed in the coolest and softest of cambric worked with gold thread, while the diamond aigrette of his turban gleamed like a star. He was smoking the most delicate Latakeeah tobacco from the snaky stem of a splendid hookah, and a gold cup of sherbet stood beside him, while a bevy of graceful Nautch-girls† were dancing before him. And yet the great man did not seem to be happy, for his face wore an expression of decided ill-temper.

Major Charlton, smoking another hookah, was seated at a little distance in an American cane rocking-chair, one of the odd contrasts to be seen in most native palaces, where French clocks and Yankee notions; Sheffield pistols and Damascus scimitars; suits of Saracen chain-armor and brand-new Paris pianos, jumbled together in quaint confusion, tell of the conflict of ideas in modern India, trying to imitate its English conquerors. Charlton was the only man seated save the Rajah, for the ministers of the Prince were obliged to wait on him barefooted and standing.

Behind the couch of the Rajah, with the usual obsequious smile on his lip, was Khoda Khan, the prime minister; and to him the great man addressed his first audible remark since dinner.

"Send away those girls. They can't dance better than so many cows."

The minister rushed forward with officious zeal, and fell on the poor dancing-girls, shouting:

"Get out, fools. His Highness says you dance like cows. Away with you."

Whereat the poor girls fled in dismay, and the great man rewarded Khoda's efforts with a growl.

"You are an ass, Khoda Khan. Find something to amuse me. I am tired and have a pain here."

And the Rajah laid his hand on his stomach and groaned, while the corners of his mouth went down lower than ever.

Major Charlton smiled slightly under his tawny mustache, as he muttered to himself:

"Dyspepsia, and no wonder."

But the great man's ear was quick, and he cried out, in English:

"What the debbil you say, major? You growl like old dog with bone. Shiver my timbers! speak out."

"I was saying," replied the white gentleman, calmly, "that your Highness had dyspepsia. It is common in my country."

The Rajah's face cleared and he sat up, for he liked to be considered an invalid.

* The Phansigars or Thugs of India believe that if any human being not one of their own order, sees the mystic lamp when they are making their offering to Kalee, or finds the victims, or if the shadow of any living thing falls on the offering, some great misfortune will overtake them within the year. They also believe that any person, not a Thug, who drinks of the mystic *goor*, a secret beverage of the goddess, can never leave them, but must follow the business of strangling forever.

† Professional dancing girls of India.

"What dippepsia?" he inquired. "You have it in Ameriky? Hey?"

Charlton smiled, for the Prince's English, having been learned in former days from a drunken sailor who had strayed to Jagpore and been made chief minister, was decidedly of the ruder order. But since the death of that estimable personage, Jack Jones, alias Shacka Khan, from *delirium tremens*, Rajah Ram Sing had always been proud of his English.

"I never had dyspepsia myself," answered Charlton; "but many people have it in my country, and there is nothing so good for it as air and exercise. Your Highness should take a ride every day."

"Dat's de ticket," assented the great man, solemnly. "Begin—let me see—next week."

Then he sunk listlessly back, and observed to Khoda Khan, in his native tongue:

"Well, have you found anything to amuse me?"

"Light of the world," replied the minister, salaaming deeply, "I would suggest that your Highness have a little fun with this great tiger-tamer, who has the boldness to call himself King of the Jungle. Would it not be well to put his powers to the test? He has *one* beast under very good control. Suppose we try him with Burrhea."

The Rajah actually started and smiled.

"You are a genius, Khoda," he said, cheerfully. "Burrhea is a bad beast. Send for him and this Govinda at once and have the cage brought out into the inner court. We will go there."

Major Charlton heard all that passed, for he understood the language perfectly; and his face grew grave. He knew Burrhea to be the largest and most ferocious tiger in the Prince's menagerie—a brute so vicious that it had only the day before mangled a keeper who was giving it food. The tiger had made a sudden pass between the bars of its cage and clawed the man's scalp off with one stroke, as if in pure malice, and then went on feeding, quietly. The Rajah seemed now to be so much pleased at the prospect of seeing a fight between Burrhea and the King of the Jungle, that he actually rose up and waddled away to the inner court of the palace, while a dozen attendants started off to execute his orders and bring the tiger and his tamer together.

Major Charlton followed the Prince slowly, with a frown on his face.

"By heavens!" he muttered, "it's too bad to set that grand fellow at this brute without any preparation. If I see any signs of danger I'll interfere, if I lose my place for it."

But he said nothing aloud, for he knew the Rajah's disposition and his own influence too well to speak at the wrong time.

Meantime the whole of the attendants had followed the great man down a cool marble corridor to the side of an inner court that resembled a huge well, about thirty feet deep and sixty broad, lined and paved with stone, and circular in form. At the sides of this pit, opening on the court below, were several iron doors; and around the top ran a gallery which led to the zenana or woman's part of the palace. The Rajah found his soft couch already laid for him at the edge of this gallery, and he had hardly taken his seat before the lofty form of Govinda, the tiger-tamer, escorted by several slaves, and leading his child by the hand, approached him.

The Rajah looked lazily up, scanned the tall figure of the "King of the Jungle" for a moment, and then nodded, as the other salaamed profoundly before him.

"You call yourself King of the Jungle, I hear," he observed, sardonically.

"I call myself Govinda, the servant of the Merciful One," replied the tamer, in a deep, sweet voice. "Men call me Jungle Rajah, Tiger King, and such titles; I only answer to the name of the Slave of the Merciful One."

"Well, well, you think yourself one of the greatest men in the world," said the Rajah, sneeringly. "You think you can conquer any tiger living."

"I can do nothing save by the will of the Merciful One," said the tamer, reverently. "He closes the mouths of beasts, and gives courage to the heart of man."

"Well, we shall see if he will give you help now," said the Rajah, with the same cold sneer. "I wish you to go down to that court and tame my best tiger, Burrhea. They are bringing in his cage now. There he is."

As he spoke, one of the iron doors opposite opened, and the end of a cage on wheels was shoved out, within which leaped and ramped a great gaunt tiger, uttering fearful roars of rage.

The tamer looked quietly at the beast, and the next moment a long rope and hook were let down from above, which lifted up the end of the cage like a portcullis. Charlton uttered a stifled angry oath as the tiger leaped out into the pit and ran raging around, while the iron door slammed to, as the cage vanished.

If Seevah had been a magnificent tiger, Burrhea was evidently a ferocious one, and his gaunt look told that he was hungry, as he ran round and round the pit, leaping up and falling back in vain attempts to scale the hard stone.

"Well, Govinda, Slave of the Merciful," asked the Prince, sarcastically, "can you tame *that* tiger before us all?"

Govinda looked calmly and reflectively at the raging beast below, and then replied:

"I have done it already. I know the tiger. He came to your Highness a present from the King of Delhi, and your Highness's stupid servants have spoiled his temper. I shall have to tame him again, unless he knows my voice."

"Go down to him, then," said the Rajah, coldly. "And to see that you do not escape the ordeal, let your child stay here."

As he spoke, he made a sign to Khoda Khan. The latter said something, in a low voice, to the slaves who surrounded Govinda, in a slang phrase, that Charlton did not understand. It sounded to him like: "Look after the straw."

Instantly, four men were on the tiger-tamer, each seizing one of his limbs, assaulting him so suddenly that he was helplessly thrown on his face, while the boy was snatched away from him to the side of the Rajah.

The tiger-tamer, in this helpless condition, was carried back, and Charlton noticed that he did not attempt to struggle, but kept his eyes fixed on the Rajah, silently. Then the young man glanced at Khoda Khan and beheld that individual's face transformed, as it were, to the face of a fiend, his black eyes glaring wildly, while his fingers clinched and unclenched nervously on a scarf which he held in his hand behind the chair of the Rajah. He seemed as if crazy to fly at the prostrate Govinda, for some reason or other. Involuntarily, the young man rose from the carpet on which he had been sitting and stepped between the two, looking Khoda full in the eye.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, sternly.

Instantly, the face of the wily vizier cleared up and he bowed low, saying:

"Nothing, Sahib, nothing."

As he quickly tucked away in his girdle the ends of the little scarf he had been twisting in his fingers, Charlton noticed that one end was knotted, but that was all; when Khoda Khan said, in the same low tones which had produced the seizure of Govinda:

"Prophet Mohammed."

Instantly, the men who had hold of the tiger-tamer let him go and set him on his feet, while they flitted away down the corridor into the palace, as if they feared being seen, but not before the late prisoner had looked keenly at every one, as they fled.

"Well, Govinda," said the Rajah, who had watched all this strange episode with his cruel smile, "are you ready to go down to the tiger?"

"I am ready, your Highness," said the other, as calmly as ever; "but I need my son with me, or else to have time to make my preparations."

"Your son will stay with me," said the Prince, coldly; "but you shall have what time you need. Go down."

Without a word, the tiger-tamer bowed low, turned and left the presence, when Charlton stepped forward, and said boldly, in English:

"Your Highness must not hurt the child."

The Rajah looked at him a moment, doubtfully, and then replied:

"I don't want to hurt the child, major. I like him. I keep him for hookah-bearer."

As he spoke, he put his arm around the little fellow and patted him affectionately. The child had been perfectly still all the time, with a coolness strange in his years, the result of frequently performing before crowds, and when the great man fondled him, he turned a serious pair of dark eyes on the Rajah Ram Sing and smiled slightly. Then the smile faded away into a look of anxiety as he gazed down into the court at Burrhea, who was ramping around like a fiend.

Charlton felt just as anxious himself, and the suspense became agonizing to him as he noticed the evident terror of the child and waited for the appearance of Govinda below. Minute after minute passed, but still no tiger-tamer, and the Rajah stirred uneasily on his couch.

"Go after him," he said to Khoda Khan, "or send after him, and have the door to the secret passage ready to open if Burrhea get the worst of it."

The vizier bowed and retired with a triumphant smile. As he passed Charlton, he sneered slightly and said:

"We shall soon see whose star is brightest, thine or mine, American Sahib."

CHAPTER IV.

TAMING A TIGER.

CHARLTON was for a moment puzzled. He knew that Khoda Khan was jealous of his influence with the Rajah, but the minister had never before dared to show open hostility. Charlton had lived in India several years, and had entered the service of this native prince to train and command his guards, which he had done so well that he had become indispensable. As an American, there was something mysterious about him to the Hindoos, which added to the awe with which he was regarded; and he had always made the sensual tyrant treat him as respectfully as the British Resident,* with whom Charlton was on excellent terms. Yet to-day Khoda Khan dared to sneer at him.

While he was thinking over the circumstance, a sudden hush in the court below showed that something had taken the tiger's attention, for it had ceased roaring and had its eyes fixed on one of the iron doors. A moment later, came three thundering knocks; the door flew open, and into the court stalked Govinda, the tiger-tamer, carrying in his hand an iron rod instead of his whip.

Instantly, Burrhea crouched down, and the man strode toward him, shouting, in stentorian tones:

"Down, Burrhea, down! Couch, sir!"

The animal seemed to be puzzled to know what to do, and hesitated, as if it half-recognized the voice, till the tamer was within two or three feet, when it uttered an angry snarl, rose up, and made a savage claw at Govinda, like a huge cat. Up went the black rod, touching the paw, and Burrhea uttered a furious roar and leaped back, snarling and spitting, but evidently cowed.

"Hot irons!" muttered Charlton, as he recognized the effect, but the next moment his attention was again riveted on Govinda.

The tiger was by no means conquered, for it snarled and roared furiously; but the undaunted tamer followed it, thrusting the hissing iron right into the angry jaws, till Burrhea fairly turned tail and fled, Govinda following the beast up and scolding loudly all the time.

The Rajah smiled with pleasure, for the exciting scene made him forget his dyspepsia; and so the tamer chased the tiger round the court till he came to the narrow door by which he had entered. Burrhea made a dash for this door but was intercepted by his conqueror, who disappeared for a moment, only to return with a second rod, glowing fiery red at the tip, in one hand, and his great whip in the other.

As he came out, Govinda gave a backward kick to the iron door and closed it with a bang, thus shutting himself in with the monster. That done, he went at Burrhea fiercely, shouting all the time, the tiger growling, roaring, and striking at him, but met at every pass by the terrible iron in the hands of the fearless Govinda. As soon as the animal turned, the trainer used his whip with fearful effect, cutting bloody gashes in the shining yellow hide, and driving the creature round the court.

In another moment, Burrhea stopped and crouched, as if to spring, uttering a roar more ferocious than ever, which was stopped by the iron held firmly to the nose of the tiger. Instantly, the roar changed to a cry of pain, down went the nose of the brute to the ground, and Burrhea turned over on his back, uttering a peculiar whining sound and holding up his paws in the air like a dog begging for mercy.

Then Govinda, the tiger-tamer, drew back to the middle of the court, and held up his whip.

"Come, Burrhea!" he cried, and stamped his foot hard.

Instantly, the animal obeyed, cowering with fear.

* The British Government keeps a minister at the court of every prince in India, called the "Resident," whose office is to watch the doings of the natives and report if there is any danger to British power, brewing among them. Though nominally independent, all these princes pay tribute to Calcutta, and the power of the Resident is almost unlimited, though his orders are always put into the form of "advice" or "requests" to the native Rajah, or Nawaub, or whatever he may be called.

"By Jove! he's done it!" cried Charlton, joyfully.

"Not yet," answered the Rajah himself. "Look."

He pointed down, and Charlton saw a door open in the side of the court. Burrhea saw it, too, and was off like a flash through the opening before the tamer, taken by surprise, could intercept the brute.

The Rajah Ram Sing laughed in his cold, heartless manner, and it was echoed by the oily chuckle of Khoda Khan, who glided to his place beside the Prince's chair just as the tiger vanished.

"That passage goes under Jagpore out into the jungle," said the Rajah, coolly. "We shall see if your friend there can catch Burrhea and bring him back to mesingle-handed, for I swear by the head of Mohammed that I will keep this child till he does."

Charlton made no reply. Govinda stood for a moment staring at the open door and the dark passage beyond, like one thunderstruck. Then the tamer turned and spoke aloud to the Rajah:

"I can tame tigers," he said, proudly, "but not traitors. Your men have let the beast escape."

"I ordered them," replied the Rajah, coolly. "You must go and bring Burrhea back alone. You call yourself the King of the Jungle; let us see if you can quell Burrhea now, with no hot irons to help you."

The tamer looked up into the eyes of the Prince as firmly as if he had been his equal or superior.

"Prince," he retorted, "the Koran saith, 'Wo to him that doth wrong to the innocent: Allah will avenge it.' What if I fail in my quest?"

"Then you will never see your child again," replied the Rajah's cold, cruel tones. "I shall keep your tigress and the boy till you bring back Burrhea. Your road lies yonder, through that door."

As he spoke, he pointed to the dark door through which Burrhea had just vanished. Govinda smiled bitterly.

"Perhaps I know better where yonder passage leads than you think," he retorted, in significant tones. "But let it pass. I will capture Burrhea, but I must have Seevah and Ali to help me. I swear on the faith of a true believer to bring them back to you. Will you let them come?"

"Consider, your Highness," cried Charlton, in English, "it is not much the poor fellow asks. Let him have his child and his tigress."

"Go to the debbil," roared the despot, angrily, the veins in his throat swelling and his face turning purple with rage. "What—shiver my topknot—who are you? Son of a sea-cook—I kick you out!"

Charlton could hardly help laughing, even in the serious nature of the situation, at the Prince's seaport slang, and he answered in the native language:

"Let the poor man have what he asks, for my sake, your Highness."

"I pay you to train soldiers, not for advice," cried the Rajah, furiously. "Here is my adviser, the vizier, Khoda Khan. Yonder man is a magician who has the evil eye. Send him away." Then turning to the court, he bellowed:

"Go, dog! Fetch Burrhea or lose your tigress, your child, and your head."

"I will give up neither," shouted back the now angry tiger-tamer. "You keep Seevah! Fool, I loosed her before I went in. Hark!"

He blew on a small whistle hung from his neck a long shrill call, and it was instantly answered by a loud roar from the interior of the palace.

The Rajah started and shrunk back on his pillows, ashy pale and quaking with fear, for the direction of the sound told that Govinda spoke truly.

Seevah was loose in the palace!

Khoda Khan fled, uttering howls of terror, and the whole crowd of the attendants ran in all directions, leaving their master alone with Charlton and the child Ali. Only the American stood his ground, and even he turned pale and trembled as he heard the roars of the great beast, coming nearer and nearer.

However, with the instinct of a soldier to defend the man whose bread he eat, Charlton ran to the side of the Rajah, who still lay quaking and unable to move; and snatching up a shield and sword, stood over him to protect him.

Again Govinda whistled, and Charlton could hear the heavy body of the tigress racing through the passages, while she roared loudly; and the frantic shrieks and shouts of men and women showed that Seevah was already among

them. Then came a sudden rush of people, falling prone in their efforts to escape and all screaming wildly, while over the press galloped the huge tigress, with her back and tail arched like a cat at play, and bounded to the edge of the court, where she stood looking down at her master, roaring louder than ever.

Charlton gazed at the picture like one fascinated: it was so grandly beautiful, till the tamer made a sign and the tigress ceased to roar.

Then she stood there, looking down, while a dead silence fell on the whole palace, in the midst of which the tiger-tamer spoke to Charlton, in very good English, like that of a well-educated man.

"Major Charlton," he cried, "I am not what I seem, but you have done your best for me, seeming as I was. You shall be rewarded yet. Here, Seevah!"

Instantly, the great tigress leaped down into the court and rubbed up against her master.

"Major Charlton," continued the mysterious tiger-tamer, "dare you brave the Rajah and let me down my child?"

"I can and will," answered the soldier, boldly.

As he spoke, he threw down his weapons, took the child in his arms and carried it to the edge of the pit. The sheer, smooth descent of the walls puzzled him a little, but he was a man of ready expedients.

In a twinkling, he had snatched off the enormous turban of one of the frightened attendants, who still lay on his face quaking, and pulled out a strip of more than a dozen yards of white calico. Knotting one end hastily round the child's waist, he let it down to the father, who stood below, little Ali being perfectly quiet and brave all the time.

In a moment more, Govinda had caught the boy to his heart. Then he turned round to Charlton.

"I will remember this," he cried. "Meantime, remember my words: *Beware of Khoda Khan and the Thugs! I shall return!*"

Then tigress, man and child vanished through the dark portal, just as the Rajah looked up from his swoon of terror.

CHAPTER V.

THUGGEE.

SIR DOUGLAS MCGREGOR, the British Resident at Jagpore, was a big heavy man about fifty, with gray hair and beard, streaked with red, and a face burned to the color of mahogany by an Indian sun. He had been the Resident for nearly twenty years, and in all that time had never quarreled with the Rajah.

On the day after the flight of Govinda with his child through the secret passage, Sir Douglas was seated in his private cabinet at the Residency, and opposite to him was Major Charlton, the American commander of the Rajah's guards.

The Resident wore his loose "sleep-clothes," a shirt and trowsers of white cotton, as everybody does in India during the hot time of day, and he lay in a grass hammock fanning himself; but for all that, the sharp old fellow was wide awake and listening attentively to Charlton.

The American was attired in a sort of military uniform, with a crimson sash, and was heavily armed with revolvers and a sword, while the turbaned helmet that he held on his knee and his spurred boots showed that he had just ridden in, spite of the heat of the day, to see the Resident.

"I sent for you, major," began Sir Douglas, "to learn the rights of this matter of the tiger-tamer yesterday. Did you see the man?"

"I did, sir."

"Do you know anything about him? Did he look like a low-caste fellow? I'm told that he speaks English as well as a Rajah? What's your opinion?"

"He certainly spoke English to me, sir, and his last words were very remarkable. He told me to beware of Khoda Khan and the Thugs."

Sir Douglas McGregor sat up in his hammock.

"Say that again, major."

Charlton repeated the words.

"Well, well, who'd have thought it!" ejaculated the old Scot, sinking back again. "I've been watching for those scoundrels for years, and here's a stranger comes and gives me the clew in a word. Ye know who the Thugs are, of course?"

"I have heard of them, Sir Douglas; but I thought that the British Government had nearly stamped them out of existence. They used to murder native travelers all over India, I believe, but never touched any Europeans—is it not so?"

"Ye're partly right and partly wrong, my young friend," answered the old Resident, dryly. "You've been in India only four years, I believe."

"Five, Sir Douglas."

"Well, five then. I've been here forty, and I remember when Thuggee was so common that you couldn't swear that every man ye met was not in league with the straggling imps. We drove them out of the British provinces, but you can't keep these brutes of Rajahs and Nawabs from winking at them. I've been hunting for evidences of Thuggee here for some time, and—but never mind. Tell me about this tiger-tamer. How came he to get into trouble with the Rajah?"

Charlton, thus urged, gave a short account of the matter, to which Sir Douglas listened attentively, every wrinkle in the thoughtful Scotch face working into queer grimaces. When Charlton described the strange behavior of the Prime Minister at the seizure of Govinda, the old man gave a grunt of assurance, and said:

"Ay, ay, Khoda's an old *Bhurtote*, and ached to be at his trade."

"What's a *Bhurtote*, Sir Douglas?"

"The chief strangler. They have men to seize the victim that they call *Shumseeas*; and the oldest man of the crowd, and the most expert, is the *Bhurtote*, that holds the *roomal*."

"And what's that, sir?"

"The handkerchief, turban, sash, anything that does the business, my young friend," replied the Resident, dryly. "God send you may never find out by sad experience what it is."

"But they'd never dare to attack me, Sir Douglas," observed the soldier, somewhat disdainfully. "I am well armed; and besides, they never kill Europeans."

"They never did, till the mutiny," answered Sir Douglas, impressively. "How many men disappeared then that were never heard of again? All were laid to sepoys, and the sepoys killed a good many, I'll admit; but I tell ye, major, that since the mutiny Thuggee is in every native kingdom, more or less. I only trust to one thing to put it down here—the Rajah is a dupe, I believe, and not in league with Khoda Khan, so we may hope to influence him to good, if we can open his eyes."

"I fear that is impossible," said Charlton, sadly. "He has not shown any anger against me for giving back the child to Govinda, but I can see that he is changed. My only reliance is that he cannot find another man that will do what I've done for his army."

Sir Douglas winked at him slyly, and gave a dry little cough.

"Did you know that he had sent Khoda Khan to see me this morning to ask me to recommend another officer in your place?" he asked, quietly.

Charlton started, and turned red with anger.

"No! The ungrateful dog! I'll save him the trouble. I'll go back now and resign my post at once. Thank God I've other friends. The Nawab of Bundelcund has offered me a higher salary."

"Ye'll do nae sic thing," responded Sir Douglas, with a chuckle. "I'm not going to have some French or Italian cut-throat sent here to stir up revolutions. Ye're a Yankee, major, but ye're a gentleman, and her Majesty's government prefers to keep a man here that will not breed trouble. I tauld Khoda Khan as much, and the auld fox went off with a flea in his lug, as the saying is."

Charlton rose and paced the floor, fuming, and hardly reconciled to the advice of the Resident, but the old minister continued, gravely:

"I've a few words of advice to give you, major. Go back, and you'll find Khoda Khan and the Rajah as civil and affectionate as cats purring for cream. *Don't trust them*. Keep among your troops, do your business, and take two or three *sowars* (troopers) with ye whenever ye ride out. Good-morning. No, stop. If you see that Govinda in the jungle on your way back, send me a note by a *sowar* and tell Govinda I want to see him. Ye understand? And don't let any strangers ride with you on your way back, specially if they are unarmed. Good-by, sir."

The old Resident turned round in his hammock without more ceremony, and closed his eyes, while Charlton, who was used to his odd ways, took up his sword in his hand to prevent any clatter, and walked quietly out of the room.

As he suddenly opened the door into the dark corridor that led through the middle of the house, a patter of bare feet and the flutter of a

white garment turning a corner of the passage told that some one had been listening at the keyhole.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KING OF THE JUNGLE.

OUT in the midst of the wildest part of the jungle, where the cover was most impenetrable, a small open space existed, heavily carpeted with long grass and surrounded by dense thickets. The towering teak trees spread their gigantic crown above it, high in the air, where the breeze stirred at intervals in the hottest of the day. The cries of pelicans, storks, cranes and flamingoes, passing to and fro overhead, showed that it was near water, while a great sandstone rock, hollowed at the side into a sort of shallow cave, offered equal probability of the lair of some wild beast. The trees were full of monkeys and parrots, chattering to each other, while the harsh cries of the peacocks increased the likelihood of beasts of prey, peacocks being notoriously common in the haunts of such creatures.

Altogether it was what East Indians call a "tigerish" place; and when we add that a strong musky smell was plainly to be perceived in the air, it will not be surprising to find some dangerous beast in the midst of the little clearing.

Sure enough there was one—a tigress—a grand creature, standing as tall as a small cow, her bright golden hide striped with the most intense velvety black, making a fine picture in the midst of the natural arena, as she stood with her back slightly arched, waving the curve of her tail slowly to and fro. She looked placid and rather lazy, as if she had just risen from sleep, and presently yawned and stretched her limbs just as a cat might do, blinking sleepily with her great green eyes.

But the most remarkable feature about this huge beast was that she seemed to be under human control, for she wore round her neck a broad collar of steel chainwork, bearing an inscription in Sanscrit letters, woven in gold wire into the chainwork. From this collar depended a heavy chain of steel, which was fastened to the trunk of a small tree close by. Furthermore, not three feet from the great beast in the shade of the rock lay little Ali, the son of Govinda the tiger-tamer, fast asleep on a leopard-skin, while on the opposite side of the inclosure, a short stumpy female elephant, with a pad on her back, browsed peacefully on a bundle of rice-stalks cast on the ground before her. A heap of baggage, the various paraphernalia of the showman's art, evinced the fact that this elephant was probably used to transport the baggage of Govinda, the tiger-tamer, and that personage himself stood near the great rock, in a space about six feet square, from which the grass had been carefully cut away and the sods turned over. The reason of these precautions was shown in the presence of a small portable furnace of sheet-iron, like that of a traveling tinker, which was flaming away at a great rate and would infallibly have set fire to the jungle had it not been thus protected, for the hot season was almost at an end, and the grass was as dry as tinder.

On the little furnace a pot was boiling, and all round the fire projected the handles of the tamer's irons, which he always kept at a white-heat in the jungle for his own protection.

Govinda stood thoughtfully by the fire, looking at the sleeping child and the great tigress alternately, and apparently nearly oblivious to the sights and sounds around him. The King of the Jungle was in the heart of his kingdom, where he knew well no human being but himself was likely to penetrate, and he had forgotten himself in a reverie.

"How much of a man's happiness depends on riches!" he said, aloud. "When I was a child like him, I was a prince, with slaves to run to every wish; and yet I was not as happy as he is to-day, who knows no home but the wild jungle, no friend but the beasts of the field. Why then do I pursue my purpose to exchange the forest for the city, the hard ground for the golden throne? Who knows? The sage says that—"

He stopped suddenly in his moralizing, for it was a peculiarity of the man to have all his senses wide awake even when most thoughtful, and he had noticed a sudden change in Seevah's demeanor. The sleepy green eyes of the tigress had opened into an intent glare, fixed on the distant jungle; and her ears were standing erect, while she snuffed the air.

Govinda watched her face and smiled to himself.

"As I thought," he soliloquized; "she scents Burrhea, and the good-for-nothing brute is coming. I must have him for the honor of my calling, though I hardly know why."

The tigress snuffed the air eagerly and walked forward to the end of her chain, where she began to paw the ground. Then her great sides heaved in spasmodic sighs, when she suddenly lifted her head and commenced to roar aloud into the depths of the jungle, calling with her mighty voice till the echoes rung again.

Little Ali stretched himself on his leopard-skin, opened his eyes and rose up, without seeming at all frightened at the tremendous noise made by the animal, but he came to Govinda at a sign from the tamer and stood ready to obey his directions.

Then they watched Seevah, whose cavernous growls and roars became louder every moment, while the great beast bounded impatiently to and fro at the end of her chain.

Presently they heard an answering roar, far away in the jungle; and instantly Seevah became perfectly still and laid herself down at the end of her chain, with her great head against the ground, listening.

The distant roaring of the tiger lasted for nearly two minutes, during all which time Seevah made no sign; but when it ceased, the mighty creature arose again and answered the call of her mate with fearful effect.

"Hark! What was that sound?"

Govinda's countenance changed as he caught up his child in his arms, and ran to the foot of a great teak tree.

The roaring of a third tiger, loud and menacing, from another quarter, showed that a rival had arisen to dispute the claims of Burrhea, if it were he that had answered Seevah!

"Go up, child, and stay there till I call thee," said Govinda, hastily, and then it might be seen that a series of spikes made of the points of bamboo shoots, nearly as hard as iron, had been driven into the sides of the teak tree, making a sort of ladder leading up among the lofty branches.

Little Ali, with a coolness that showed that he was accustomed to danger, ran up this curious ladder, which is much used in the East Indies by the wilder tribes of savages. The ends of the spikes were secured by strips of ratan to a long bamboo, flexible and strong, which formed a railing outside; and the boy had no trouble in ascending to a safe position in the forks of the branches, from whence he could look down into the jungle unseen.

Meantime, Govinda, the tiger-tamer, returned to his little furnace, and stood there with an iron in each hand, listening intently. The sweat stood out on his brow in great drops, for he knew that he was about to experience a great peril, but the firm set of his jaw showed that he had resolved to confront it.

Meantime, the tigress had become perfectly quiet, and lay down at the end of her chain, stretching herself with an air of great luxury and satisfaction, occasionally passing her fore-paws over her face, as if washing.

The two tigers outside in the jungle continued to roar to each other in tones of great ferocity, coming nearer and nearer momentarily.

Govinda kept his eyes roving over the jungle coverts, where now everything was as still as death, save for the grand voices of the two rivals, challenging each other to battle. When they were silent, the stillness was oppressive, for birds and monkeys had alike fled away before the royal creatures in their anger, and only one man remained to brave them.

Presently came a crash in the underbrush, and out leaped a fine tiger, roaring loudly, as he bounded into the midst of the clearing and looked around him, lashing his tail.

Govinda withdrew both irons from the fire and watched the beast silently, and as he did so the tiger caught sight of the tigress, and instantly wheeled toward her and crouched, silent as death.

But ere another instant had passed a second roar and the crashing of bushes announced that the rival was coming, and Govinda gave a sigh of relief as the well-known form of Burrhea, still wearing the spiked collar of the Rajah of Jagpore, burst into the clearing, and dashed at the wild tiger.

The other beast instantly wheeled to meet Burrhea, and the two halted within thirty feet of each other, and crouched to the earth, their green eyes glaring, their tails slapping from side to side with a vicious motion, while they trembled with rage and impatience as they settled into their positions to spring.

Govinda thrust back his irons into the fire, folded his arms, and watched them calmly. He

knew there was no further danger for him at present, and he felt disposed to enjoy the spectacle of the battle. So also did Seevah, for the artful creature actually seemed as if she were laughing at the combatants, as she yawned and stretched, striking her tail against the ground with short taps of lazy pleasure, as she looked at the tigers fighting for her sake.

Presently, with a grand roar, both of the beasts rose into the air in a simultaneous spring, and came together tooth and nail, reared aloft like two giants wrestling, each flying at the other's throat.

They were nearly evenly matched, Burrhea a little the largest, but gaunted and weakened by long confinement, while the wild tiger was full of native vigor. To balance the account, Burrhea wore a great spiked collar that prevented the other beast from catching his throat fairly, and the wild tiger was reduced to a neck-hold, not so dangerous.

For the first minute, strangled roars and snarls of fury, with the crunching of jaws and the sound of the great talons tearing at the tough hides of the two beasts, made a pandemonium of sounds indescribably terrible. After that, both tigers were silent, their gripe having settled, and they stood erect on their hind-legs, wrestling and swaying to and fro for the mastery. Then Govinda noticed that the wild tiger had worked his nose under the collar of Burrhea, and had shifted his gripe to the throat of the Rajah's beast, while Burrhea was slowly falling back. The tigress saw it, too, and sat up as if interested, watching the battle.

Govinda withdrew both irons from the fire again, and advanced toward the fighting animals, just as Burrhea, with a strangled howl of pain, fury and fear commingled, fell over backward, with the other tiger at his throat. Now they rolled over, clawing and biting, the wild tiger slowly but surely getting the other underneath him, Burrhea growing weaker and weaker. At last it became evident that the battle was over, the cage-tiger conquered, and likely to be killed at once.

Then, on a sudden, Govinda rushed forward, unnoticed in the fighting, till he planted both irons beside the nose of the wild tiger.

The effect was instantaneous and ludicrous. The great beast that had laughed at the claws and teeth of Burrhea, though great gashes seamed its golden hide and blood covered the ground, quailed before the sudden and exquisite torture of the hot irons on the most sensitive part of its body. Instantly it let go Burrhea with a roar of pain, and fled in utter dismay, followed by Govinda for several steps, applying the gl-wing rods to accelerate its pace. This he did so effectively, that the tiger bounded away in perfect dismay, the tiger-tamer shouting at the top of his voice all the time till the animal had quite disappeared.

Then Govinda returned to where the beaten Burrhea was lying covered with blood, half of one ear hanging loose, great patches of hide torn off, a gash in the throat that seemed enough to kill any creature, and, altogether, the appearance of a thoroughly demoralized tiger, who had had enough of it for one day.

The animal had half raised itself as the tamer came to it, but sunk back, exhausted and moaning.

Govinda spoke to it, and Burrhea seemed to know his voice, for the beast cowered and crouched.

"He will not escape now," quoth Govinda to himself, as he went to his stores and fetched forth a steel chain, as strong as that worn by Seevah.

He came back to Burrhea, who lay apparently dying, and stirred up the tiger with his foot while he fastened the chain to the spiked collar of the beast.

Then he went to the fire for another iron, came back, and called to Burrhea to rise, which the wounded tiger did, slowly and with difficulty, at a touch of the glowing iron, crawling across the arena to the foot of a tree, where Govinda fastened the chain to a huge root, and Burrhea lay down as if completely worn out.

The tamer then disappeared in the brush, and soon returned, carrying a pail of water, which he set before the tiger, who lapped it eagerly and with manifest gratitude. After that, the beast allowed Govinda to handle it with impunity, and even to examine the wound in its throat, which he washed carefully and soothed by placing a wet piece of cotton on the inside of the collar to prevent its chafing. Burrhea seemed to be resuming the old habits of tameness, which Govinda had known him to possess at Delhi, and when the tamer brought him a dish

of boiled rice swimming in buffalo butter, such as Seevah was fed on, the poor wounded brute did not disdain to touch it. Then Govinda seemed satisfied, and observed, as he drew back:

"Before I have had you a week, my fine fellow, you shall be as quiet as Seevah, and hear Ali as well, or I will know the reason."

He walked back to his fire and replaced his irons, then went to the tigress, who seemed somewhat uneasy, and drove her back to the trunk of her tree with his great whip, scolding her sternly till she lay down, looking guilty and ashamed. Then he called down Ali and made him feed the tigress, which the boy did with alacrity, after which Govinda took him over to make the acquaintance of Burrhea, carrying some scraps of meat, which the wounded tiger accepted from the child without any signs of ferocity. Govinda stood close by, iron in hand, ready to punish the smallest exhibition of insubordination, and was not satisfied until he had made the tiger submit to be handled by the child. Even then he burned the beast severely on the paw, when he detected it putting out its talons from their sheath.

He had finished his first lesson on the wounded tiger and taken Ali away, when he heard a noise that caused him to start. It was the distant gallop of a horse on the turf, and it seemed to surprise Govinda.

"On the old Benares road!" he muttered.

"Who can it be?"

He turned to Ali.

"Up the ladder again, boy, and stay till I come back. I must see who is there."

Ali obeyed silently, and Govinda loosed Seevah from the tree and started forward on a run, holding the tigress by the chain with one hand, his whip in the other, as he dashed into the cover and disappeared.

He had been gone not more than a minute, when two men, black and nearly naked, save for a turban and waist-cloth, stole out of the jungle on the opposite side and approached the fire.

"The tiger is chained, he cannot harm us," said one, in a low tone. "We may get both if we are quick, for she will kill the soldier for us, that the goddess may have her will."

"But how shall we get him?" asked the other.

"Take the child," responded the first. "He will come after him, and then we shall have him. But we must be quick or he will be back with his brute."

The other nodded, and both ran quickly to the tree, in the branches of which little Ali crouched, trembling, for he had seen the men and realized instinctively that they must have been watching him.

Then they began to climb the ladder in haste, and the child, active as a cat, stole away among the branches above, keeping the trunk between him and his pursuers, and striving to keep out of their sight, for as yet they only knew that he had gone up the tree, but could not see him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RANEE LUCHMEE.

THE great cool corridors of the Residency, crossing the house from side to side and causing a slight breeze at all times, opened on a wide veranda that ran round the whole building. As Charlton stepped out on the shady side of the house, he found this veranda strewn with the prostrate forms of twenty or thirty native servants, in their white dresses, all snoring away in chorus, but no sign was visible of the eaves-dropper who had fled from him.

Outside was a broad expanse of yellow grass, burnt up by the sun, but dotted here and there with green patches under the shelter of the clumps of trees that ornamented the lawn. Under one of these clumps stood his own gray Arab stallion, Alborak, held by a trooper of the Rajah's guards, who recognized his chief and promptly brought up the animal.

Alborak, like most horses in India, owing to the mingled cowardice and tricks of the native grooms, was full of vice, and had to be held by the head when he was mounted, greeting Charlton with an ill-tempered side kick as he came. However, the long spurs of the young officer pretty soon reduced the animal to obedience, when Alborak flew over the lawn at the top of his speed, and in a very few minutes was out of the glaring sun and into the cool shadow of a *tope* or grove of mango trees beyond. The Residency was three or four miles from the city of Jagpore, and on the opposite side from that on which the palace of the Rajah was situated. The royal palace was perched on the brow of a lofty hill, with steep sides toward the town, and was surrounded by the walls of an old forti-

fication, built in the days before artillery was formidable, but nevertheless garnished with big guns, that frowned down over the town.

There were two ways to the Palace of Jagpore, one through the crowded bazars of the city itself, the other around the walls, called the Jungle Road. It was down this road that Charlton took his way on that morning, partly to escape the fearful heat of the open plain, and partly to gain time to cogitate over his position and command his temper. He felt furiously angry with Khoda Khan and the Rajah, and at the same time a dull sense of impending evil came over him, to make him hesitate about breaking out openly. He slackened the pace of his horse as soon as he reached the shade of the mango trees, and rode slowly along toward the jungle, followed by his orderly.

Charlton had often hunted round Jagpore, and knew that deer and antelopes, wild boars and hares, tigers, wolves, jackals and foxes, were in plenty near the Jungle Road.

Armed and mounted as he was, he had no fears for his own safety, and rode tranquilly along, buried in his thoughts, till the cover on each side of the road became denser than ever, the *surput* grass giving way to bushes, under trunks of teak and ironwood trees that towered in the air a hundred feet and more. Every now and then a little glade presented itself to the view running into the jungle, and flocks of antelopes started out in affright from the grass in which they were lying asleep, roused by the click of Alborak's shoes on the road. Overhead, the harsh cries of the peacocks and the cooing of wild pigeons were incessant, as the birds called to each other, and chattering troops of monkeys scampered across the road every now and then as he approached them, impudent because seldom hunted.

Charlton hardly noticed all these things which he had seen so often on the jungle road; but he presently started, as the sound of horses' feet behind him announced that some one was following him. Instinctively he shoved the butts of his revolvers forward in his sash, and reined up Alborak to look round.

He beheld only an old white-bearded moon-shee, or professional teacher, mounted on a donkey, pottering along after him, while behind the old man came two bearers on foot, carrying a palanquin, followed by two veiled women on donkeys.

The old moonshee was making signals to him to stop, and hurrying his donkey with a stick, as if he wished to speak to the young soldier; and Charlton, who knew the old fellow by sight as a very respectable teacher of Hindostanee and Persian, by the name of Mirza Baba, felt somewhat ashamed of his involuntary motion toward his pistols.

"By Jove," he muttered, "old McGregor's stories of Thugs are making me nervous. This old fellow can't be one, anyway, and the rest are women, all but the bearers."

So he halted till old Mirza Baba came up, and saluted him kindly, saying:

"Well, Mirza, what's the matter?"

"Oh, sahib, Burra Sahib!" cried the old man in tones of great terror, "we are undone unless your resplendency can save us. Here is the Ranee Luchmee* on a pilgrimage to Benares, covered with jewels, and her guards have left her at the edge of the jungle, saying they are afraid of the Thugs. And the Ranee will go on, in spite of all I can say—I, who am only a poor scribe."

Charlton looked a little surprised, but very angry.

"Where are these guards, and how many are there?" he asked, sharply.

"They were five matchlock-men that came on from the last village," answered the moonshee, trembling. "If your resplendency will only send your orderly to drive them back, perhaps they will come on."

"You're better off without them than with them," said Charlton, dryly. "Such fellows are no use. What do they fear, the fools?"

"The Thugs, great lord, the Thugs," was all the old man could answer. "They have killed many people in this very jungle."

Charlton started. These Thugs seemed to meet him at every turn that day. He looked around and noticed that they were in a very lonely spot, near a bridge which spanned a dry ravine that crossed the road a little further on. He deliberated a few moments, and then his generous nature triumphed over his selfishness.

"I will see the Ranee safe out of this jungle

*Lady Luchmee. Begum is the title of a princess. Ranee of most noble ladies.

to the next village on the Benares road myself," he said at last.

Then he turned to his orderly.

"Ride at speed to the barracks," began the young chief, "and tell the Jemahdar (captain) to send Sirdar Hamet Khan with twenty sowars (troopers) out on the Benares road after me. I shall need the escort as I return at night, if they don't reach me before. Go!"

The orderly, a swarthy, black-bearded fellow in the brilliant dress of the Maharajah's horse, laid his hand on his head in token of obedience and galloped off, when Charlton turned to his companions, and said curtly:

"Go on, moonshee, keep your party ahead, and go as fast as you can. Thugs, if any are here, attack from behind, so I'll bring up the rear."

The old moonshee was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, which Charlton soon cut short, and the little party moved on at a jog trot, the young soldier dropping well to the rear.

As they went on, the road grew wilder and wilder, till they came to the crossing that led to Jagpore; after which it descended into a long valley between two lofty banks, thickly clothed with jungle, and became the road to the Holy City of Benares. This was very seldom used, as the pilgrims usually went by another route that did not approach nearer than fifty miles to Jagpore, and, in consequence, the way was, for the most part, overgrown with long grass, that made progress slow and laborious.

They straggled along for perhaps a couple of miles, the two bearers going slower and slower, till at last they stopped, set down the palanquin, and entered into a warm dispute with the old moonshee as to the possibility of proceeding any further. Charlton rode forward and sternly ordered them to take up their load, which they sullenly did, and went on a little further. Then, on a sudden, they dropped their poles, and bolted off into the jungle, being hidden in an instant by the tall *surput* grass, where it was hopeless for a horse to follow them.

Instinctively Charlton drew a revolver, but before he could cover either of the men, they were out of sight, and there he sat on the road, with three women, an old man, and three donkeys to take care of, besides a palanquin without bearers.

"Oh, Sahib, Burra Sahib!" cried the old moonshee, as he surveyed the scene, "whatever shall we do now?"

"Why, we must turn back to Jagpore, of course," said Charlton, crossly. "When the escort comes up, we'll soon find bearers." Then he muttered to himself in English: "Deuce take this Rane Luchmee and her stupid old pilgrimage. I suppose the old woman wants to pray for some sick cat."

He had taken it for granted, it will be seen, that the tenant of the palanquin was some wrinkled princess as fat as a prize-pig, of whose like he had seen several specimens before.

What was his surprise, therefore, when one of the sweetest voices in the world addressed him from within the abandoned vehicle, saying:

"If the Sahib does not object, I will ride behind him to the next station, so that we can get on faster, and so the Sahib can return before dark to Jagpore."

As the Rane spoke, she parted the curtains of the palanquin, with a brown arm of wonderful shapeliness and grace, none the less effective for being adorned with two magnificent bracelets, set with large diamonds, and looked out at Charlton.

The young soldier started, for he had never seen a more lovely face in India, with its great black eyes, soft and lustrous, satin folds of black hair parted over the brow and twined with ropes of pearls, pouting red lips curving into a smile, and showing brilliant white teeth. The quaint effect of a gold nose-ring, set through a hole in one nostril and falling over the mouth, could not destroy the beauty of the dark face, though it made it odd and piquante.

The Rane Luchmee looked at the young soldier and smiled, and Charlton could not help smiling in reply.

"If the princess will accept my escort, I shall be proud to carry her," he said, courteously; "but I fear she will be unable to mount my horse, for he's very vicious."

Rane Luchmee laughed merrily.

"Oh, I am used to that," she answered, and in a trice, out of the palanquin sprang one of the lightest and most graceful figures Charlton had ever seen, except among the Nautch-Girls or professional dancers.

The ladies of high caste in India are mostly fat and unwieldy, on account of their lazy

habits, and are consequently far from attractive to white men; but the Rane Luchmee would have been called beautiful anywhere. She was dressed in the most gorgeous manner, glittering with gold and jewels, and wore no veil, unlike her attendants.

As Charlton hesitated what to do to help her to mount, the gay lady called out:

"Bring your horse beside the *palkee*, (palanquin), and I'll show you how we do it."

Charlton understood her object; for the roof of the *palkee*, as it stood on the ground, was about four feet high, and strong enough to bear her weight. He turned his horse sidewise to the now empty vehicle, and the Rane clapped her hands, gave a short run and a bound.

Presto! She was on the top of the *palkee*, and in another moment had leaped to the croup of Charlton's Arab, while she clasped the young soldier round the waist with the beautiful brown arms he had admired so much, and cried with a musical laugh:

"Now, Burra Sahib Lera-Wallah (Great Lord in battle). You are the captive of Luchmee, for all your valor. Will you stay here?"

Charlton was not insensible to the beauty of this gay Rane with the free manners, which he laid to the account of her riches and consequent freedom from restraint, so he answered as gayly:

"Beautiful Luchmee, I am content to be your captive forever, if you will turn back to Jagpore, instead of going on to this stupid pilgrimage."

"Would you really like me to turn back with you?" she asked, in a coaxing tone, allowing her cheek to brush his as he turned round to look at her.

Charlton stared into her eyes for a moment and then turned away with a slight shiver as if he felt cold. The innocent-looking old moonshee had pushed his donkey up beside him, and the two women were coming closer. There was a strange snaky glitter in the Rane Luchmee's eyes that he could not understand. He felt her arms unclasp from his waist and noticed that she was fumbling at her sash.

Then, all on a sudden, the old moonshee made a grasp at his sword arm, calling out, in a loud tone:

"*Hookah boor lao!* (Fill your pipe.)"

The meaning of the words was never made plain, for at that moment Alborak, irritated at the too close approach of the donkeys, lashed out right and left, upsetting *palkee*, donkeys and all, and throwing the Rane nearly off, so that she had to cling to Charlton's waist for support. Then the vicious beast took the bit in his teeth and ran away at full speed on the Benares road, leaving Mirza Baba tearing his beard and cursing.

Presently the old man recovered himself and said:

"Away, brethren. The goddess cannot lie, for she gave us the omens. We were not quick enough at the *jinnee*,* but Luchmee will have him yet, for he is young, and she is beautiful and the daughter of the king of all stranglers, Bukeha Khan, on whose head be blessings. Scatter all."

In a moment he and the pretended women had leaped off their donkeys, with an activity that told them to be vigorous men, dropped their cumbersome clothes in the grass, and darted off into the jungle, attired only in turbans and waist cloths, striking across for the place where they knew that the road curved round, to intercept Charlton.

Meantime, Alborak flew along at such a pace that Charlton had much ado to control him with both hands, and the Rane clung to his waist with the ease of a practiced horsewoman while he reduced the horse to obedience. Her eyes were gleaming strangely, and she clutched in her hand, where it had rested since she had drawn it forth, the terrible *roomal*, or noose, with the sacred *goorchal*, or knot, tied by the high-priest of Kalee.

The American, all unconscious of the beautiful demon he bore behind him, busied himself with Alborak, and at last pulled him up to a walk. Then, with a sudden dextrous movement, the girl threw the fatal scarf over his head, and a moment later, was twisting the noose with the ferocity of a tigress, pulling the young soldier, despite arms and valor, back over the croup of his horse, choking and powerless.

*The signal to dispatch the victim used by the Thugs, who employ a regular slang, like our thieves' gibberish.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

NEVER yet in all his life had Charlton been so hard bested as there in the wild jungle alone with the beautiful demon who had so suddenly attacked him. The noose of the fatal scarf was arranged with the Thug slip-knot which Luchmee had pushed close to the nape of his neck in her first motion, and into which she had inserted her long slender fingers from below, in such a way that she could give a complete turn of the wrist, twisting the *roomal* tight, with nothing more to do but to cling there, a passive weight, without letting go.

The young soldier felt his senses failing him from the terrible pressure on his throat and instinctively dropped his bridle and threw up both hands in a desperate endeavor to loose himself from the gripe of the *roomal*. As he did so, Luchmee gathered herself up on the horse's croup with an agility that told of the professional acrobat, and sprang off with all her strength, pulling hard at Charlton's throat.

In his dazed and weakening state he allowed himself to be dragged off his horse, still tugging at the scarf, and fell on the grass at the feet of Luchmee, Alborak galloping madly away toward Jagpore.

As he came down, the beautiful demon with a dexterity peculiar to the tribe of fanatics to which she belonged, managed to turn him over on his face, and in a moment more was kneeling on his back with one knee, the other drawn up so as to set her heel on his neck, while she pulled and twisted at the scarf with all her force.

In vain Charlton wrenched blindly and weakly at the strangling noose, for a black cloud swam before his eyes, and he was no longer sensible even of who had attacked him, so much were his faculties absorbed in the vague feeling that he was choking somehow. Then he found himself growing weaker and weaker, while the pain of the suffocation seemed to be leaving him. His hands fell from the noose, powerless on the earth, and he seemed to be falling asleep quietly and peacefully. As he sunk into the insensibility that precedes death, he was faintly aware of the loud roar of a tiger close by and then he knew no more.

How long he lay insensible he could not tell, but he woke up to find himself on his back on the grass, looking up at the gigantic figure of Govinda the tiger-tamer, while Seevah stood by her master, staring at the soldier with a wistful expression, as if undecided whether to consider him an enemy or not. Instinctively Charlton's hands went up to his throat, and the noose was gone, though he himself felt so weak that he could not keep up his arm. Govinda looked down at him and smiled as he said in English:

"You have been preserved in a wonderful manner, Major Charlton. Seevah and I came just in time to save your life. Women have been fatal to mankind since the days of the Father Adam of whom your sacred books speak, though we Hindoos believe differently. This woman is Luchmee, Queen of the Nautch-girls, as they call her, the most beautiful and the wickedest woman in India. You should have known better than to take her up behind you. Can you rise now?"

Charlton heard the husky rattle of his own breath as he slowly drew it in, and he made an effort to rise from the ground, which was frustrated by his extreme weakness. Govinda extended his hand and assisted him up to a sitting posture, when the young man felt a great deal better, and began to look around him.

He started, and the blood rushed to his heart, as he saw Luchmee lying on the ground not six feet from him, her hands bound fast with the very scarf she had used to strangle him, but otherwise unfettered, though she lay crouched together as if in mortal terror, still as death, only her wonderful dark eyes, large and piteous as those of a dying antelope, roving from his face to that of the tiger-tamer as if asking for mercy. The secret of her passive condition was explained a moment later when the girl incautiously moved her head to shake off an intrusive musketo. Instantly Seevah uttered one of her furious cavernous growls, sounding as if they came from the bowels of the earth, and made a motion toward Luchmee as if about to annihilate her. The girl shrunk together in mortal terror, the sweat rolling down in streams from her dark face; but a word from Govinda restored the animal's placidity, and Charlton began to understand the secret of the tiger-tametheater. The tigress had been taught to display on occasion a ferocity that Govinda was careful to limit to mere show, in order to retain his control over her.

Nevertheless, the tones of the animal were so terribly real that the young soldier forgot his weakness and tottered up to his feet, where he stood swaying to and fro, supported by Govinda.

After a few minutes the weakness went off and he began to feel sympathy for Luchmee: the girl looked so helpless and beautiful. He cleared his throat and tried to speak, but his voice came hoarse and low, so that he could hardly hear himself.

"What are you going to do with her?" he asked.

"She ought to be hung to yonder tree in her own noose," said the tamer, sternly. "Her father was Buksba Khan, a notorious Thug leader, who boasted that he could pull any cavalier from his horse, single-handed. He tried it with me once, and I caught him with my sword so that I ripped open his chest like the door of a house. He taught her well, for she is a queen among her fellows of the Nautch-girls, and has ruined more men in India than the Enchantress who devoured children alive."

"But she is already punished," urged Charlton, on whose face the piteous, pleading dark eyes were already producing their effect.

Govinda turned and regarded him intently, then shrugged his shoulders.

"So!" he said, dryly, "the spell of Luchmee is on you, it seems; and you will not be warned."

Charlton's color came faintly into his face as he replied:

"She has failed in her attempt, and I shall never be in danger from her again, for I shall know her and she dare not approach me."

Govinda laughed sardonically.

"Where is your horse?" he asked. "You had him here, and now you are on foot. How will you get back to Jagpore, with the Thugs after you and the sun low in the sky? Do you think they will give you up now that you know them? Man, I tell you that the moment you stir fifty feet from this tiger's of mine, you are in danger, until your horse comes back."

"But, if I wait here long enough, there is a party of my men coming up for me," urged Charlton.

The tamer's countenance cleared up at once, and he seemed to be much relieved as he heard the distant trampling of horse, that announced the approach of the escort.

"Very well," said he, gravely; "then I will leave you to them, and take Seevah with me, for she cannot endure horses. As for this woman, leave her to me, and I will take her to the jungle and execute justice on her."

"Nay, not so, good Govinda," cried Charlton, eagerly, for the pleading dark eyes were beginning to have their effect on him. "She has not harmed you, but me. Give her to me, and I will answer that she is harmless."

"As you will," answered Govinda, shortly. "I hope you may not repeat it."

He turned away into the jungle, followed by Seevah, leaving Charlton standing in the road by the prostrate girl, just as the troopers of the Rajah's guard came into sight, galloping up, and leading Alborak.

Charlton's mind was agitated by a tempest of emotions as his men approached; gratitude for his escape; a mixture of anger and admiration toward the strange assailant whose beautiful fingers had brought his pride so low, and a determination to punish her in his own way.

"Stand up," he said to her, while his men were still some distance off, and the girl sprang to her feet, with the ease and agility of her long gymnastic training. "I give you your life," he said, quietly, to her. "You sought mine, but in my country we hold it shame to strike a woman. Will you ever attempt my life again?"

Luchmee's beautiful eyes filled with tears, as she fell on her knees and ejaculated:

"Never, great lord, never. Forgive poor Luchmee, and she will be your slave forever and ever, to do all my lord's wishes."

"Will you come back with me to Jagpore in the midst of my soldiers and give up the names of your accomplices?" asked Charlton, sternly.

Luchmee began to weep bitterly.

"Anything, anything, dread lord. The wicked old moonshee, Mirza Baba, deceived me, and I will tell you all."

"You shall," said Charlton, sternly. "for I shall take you to Sir Douglas McGregor myself."

Instantly, Luchmee's countenance changed to an expression of alarm.

"The Ingleez Sahib! No, no! The Rajah! He can judge me."

"He can do no such thing," said Charlton,

sharply. "I believe he is in league with you. You go to Sir Douglas."

The horses were coming up fast, when Luchmee suddenly started to her feet, bound as she was, and cried, with a scornful laugh:

"Take me then to him, Burra Sahib Leral-Wallah! Fool, do you think you can take the queen of the Nautch-girls?"

Then she fled into the jungle, leaving Charlton gazing after her like a fool, for he had allowed her to get away, and was still too weak to follow on foot.

Just then his men came thundering up leading Alborak, and many were the expressions of delight at his safety uttered by the swarthy Mahratta horsemen, who had been frightened to death by the spectacle of the riderless steed, for they adored Charlton.

However, they received little or no satisfaction from their chief as to his adventures, until he had called for a flask of arrack and taken a long pull of the fiery liquor. This seemed to restore his strength at once, by toning up his nervous system, which alone had suffered through the strangling of Luchmee.

"I have been set on by Thugs and rescued by Govinda the tiger-tamer," was his only explanation. "Search the jungle here for a woman and bring her to me."

The men uttered a cheer and rushed into the jungle on Luchmee's track, hacking a path for themselves with their keen tulwars, but unable to effect anything without great difficulty.

Then, for the first time, Charlton became aware of a strong smell of smoke from the jungle behind him, in which Govinda had disappeared, and he heard the loud crackling of flames mingled with the cries of wild beasts.

The jungle was on fire!

CHAPTER IX.

A JUNGLE FIRE.

To say that Charlton was startled at the discovery of the jungle being on fire is not enough. For a moment his heart seemed to stand still with terror, for he knew at once that he and all with him were in the most frightful peril. The tall *surput* grass which grows in the jungle to a length of eight or nine feet, was parched by the intense heat of the long summer into yellow hay, dry as tinder, while most of the underbrush was more or less withered. Only the tall teak trees remained green and fresh above, for their roots struck deep down to the springs below. As for the bamboo thickets, Charlton could hear them crackling as loud as distant musketry, as the flames exploded the air contained in their hollow joints, and turned their juices into steam.

Already, as he looked back, dense clouds of smoke were driving over the road to Jagpore, and far away down its course he could see the red flames leaping from the jungle border, and licking up the grass in the road. It was clearly impossible to return to Jagpore, except through the fire.

Could he stay where he was?

He looked up at the jungle, and the look answered his question ere it was well formed in his mind. He could see nothing but a dense cloud of smoke not a hundred feet off, through which red tongues of flame were shooting up to a height of thirty or forty feet. It was clear that he must flee on the road to Benares if he hoped to save his life, even for a little while. He had no need to issue an order, for his men saw the peril as well as he, and the Sirdar Hamet Khan, his trusty lieutenant, called out to him:

"We must ride for the tank of Sultan Tippoo, or we shall be burnt alive, Sahib."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than the whole party turned their horses' heads and tore away at breakneck speed on the road to Benares.

For some minutes they were racing with the fire, which they could hear tearing through the jungle about a hundred yards on their right, though it did not seem to be approaching the road. One reason of this was that the ground rose up in that direction and that the flames naturally crept up hill faster than down the slope, but Charlton noticed that the road climbed a little hill ahead of them, and knew that the ground fell away to the right into a low valley full of matted *surput* grass and dry bushes.

As he thought of this, he dug his spurs into Alborak, and the whole party flew rather than galloped up the hill till they came to the top. Before them lay a steep, stony *nullah* or ravine, crossing the road at the foot of the declivity, bare of vegetation and running down toward a

broad, glittering sheet of water, known as "the tank of Sultan Tippoo," and famous as the resort of wild water-fowl of all kinds.

They were none too soon in reaching the summit of the hill, for as they did so Charlton heard a loud, roaring noise, and looking back saw that the fire had reached the valley grass, leaping across it and sweeping up the hill with the speed of an express-train.

The horses squealed with new terror, dashing away, reckless of control, toward the stony ravine and the distant pond, in the blind instinct of all hunted animals to take to water.

Away they clattered through the ravine, and as they did so the fire reached the top, and the smoke came whirling down on their heads, choking and blinding them. They galloped on, following a rough path, only sensible of the fact that there was no vegetation round them, and that they were therefore safe from a fiery death, though suffocation seemed almost as imminent as ever.

They could hear that the flames had leaped the ravine and were tearing along toward Benares, and then Charlton saw through the smoke the gleam of the waters in the tank of Sultan Tippoo, and heard the mad rushing of the wild beasts of the jungle, driven from their coverts by the flames toward the protecting lagoon.

A few moments later Alborak was standing knee-deep in the tank, trembling violently and panting with his rapid gallop, while all round the horsemen were cowering and splashing tigers and antelopes, wolves and deer, jackals and buffaloes, wild boars and bares, side by side and regardless of each other, huddled together in a common terror, and gazing panic-stricken at the black clouds of smoke that came driving over the lake, shutting out the sunlight and making every thing murky.

Charlton could not bear to look long on account of the acrid character of the smoke, which injured his eyes, but he noticed that the flames were less and less conspicuous, and a hoarse rumbling of thunder began to be audible.

At once he comprehended that a new danger was coming, by no means uncommon in India. The heat of the jungle-fire had operated to disturb the nice balance of the atmosphere prevalent at the end of the hot season, and an Indian tempest was approaching, to put an end to the fire.

Charlton had seen these tempests before, and he knew that the rain came down in sheets, flooding the country in a few minutes and raising rivers twenty or thirty feet in a single hour.

And he remembered that he was in the mouth of a ravine at least seventy feet deep, made by the action of water in just such tempests!

He had not very long to think, for in another moment a terrible darkness fell over the scene, a gloom as of midnight, and Charlton knew, though he could not see it, that the great black tornado-cloud was sweeping across the zenith and shutting out the sun.

But still the fire kept on roaring away, and the smoke settled thicker than ever over the scene, weighed down by the oppressive sultry air that preceded the storm. The soldiers could hardly breathe, and Charlton was fain to imitate the blind instinct of the wild beasts, by slipping off his horse and bringing his face down to the very edge of the water to secure a breath of air. As he came down he rested his hand on some animal's back, and found himself beside a wild tiger, that was huddled up close to a deer and hiding itself beneath the waters in an agony of fear. Alborak was so completely quieted by the same potent spell that he did not offer to kick his master; so there was the whole mass of animals and men in this strange fellowship, while overhead swept along the majestic tornado-cloud.

Presently a broad white flash, blinding in its intensity, illumined the scene, and Charlton saw the clouds of smoke, the burning trees, the huddled animals and the awe-stricken faces of his own men as plainly as if there were no veil between them and him. Then the darkness and the crash of the thunder came together, and down came the rain, in an apparently solid sheet of water.

The relief from the previous sense of suffocation was almost instantaneous, and for a few moments the coolness of the rain seemed delightful; but as soon as the mighty tempest had beaten down fire and smoke with its own overmastering force, a new peril arose. The animals seemed to be sensible of it, for they began to move out of the lake, scrambling confusedly along, and Charlton realized the reason when he felt the waters rising rapidly to his armpits.

whereas they had only touched his waist before.

The darkness was as intense as ever, save when the flashes of electricity made the scene momentarily visible, and Charlton saw by one of these gleams that his men were trying to follow the example of the animals, moving to higher ground. As quickly as he could, he climbed on Alborak, gave the intelligent Arab his head and quickly realized that the horse's instinct was taking them both to safety, for he felt the water falling lower and lower, as Alborak splashed along. By the occasional gleam of the lightning, he became aware that he was climbing a bank into the burnt jungle, where skeleton trees waved their blackened arms in the midst of the tempest, and where the ground was fetlock deep in gray a hes, rapidly turning to mud. His men were all round him, and Hamet Khan shrieked into his ear amid the roar of the tempest some words of comfort and advice which he failed to understand.

Then a great black cloud seemed to come leaping down the hill where he was, and in a moment the whole party was stricken by a cold blast of wind, laden with sharp hailstones and mud, that caught man and horse as if they had been straws and smote them to the earth or whirled them away into the lake.

Charlton felt himself going helplessly, and in another moment he was out in the lake, parted from his horse and struggling against the waves raised by the tornado.

Instinctively, he struck out, and his hands touched something hard and floating, which he recognized as the trunk of a tree. With the desperation of a drowning man, he clung to it, and had the satisfaction of feeling that the cold blast was passing over, followed by another from an opposite quarter that felt as if it came from the mouth of a steam boiler, wet and hot.

Bad as this last was, it was not so intolerable as the cold blast, and he made shift to crawl up on the floating log, when he felt himself comparatively secure from immediate death, and able to watch the abating tempest.

As he gazed around him at the blue-black velvety clouds, driving past overhead, seemingly a few feet above him, a white flash of lightning revealed to him that the log had other occupants, and that one of them was a human figure. He crawled along the log during the next interval of darkness, and the flash that followed illumined the well-known figure of Luchmee, the Queen of the Nautch-girls, her gay robes torn to tatters, her hair hanging loose and bedraggled over her shoulders, while close beside her cowered a leopard, crowding up against her as if anxious for sympathy and companionship in the presence of the common danger.

Luchmee's back was turned to the young soldier, and she did not seem to be aware of his presence till he was near enough to touch her.

Then, amid the vivid flashes of the lightning and the crashing of the Indian thunder, Charlton laid his hand on Luchmee's shoulder, and she turned, with a violent start, and recognized the man she had tried to murder!

The beautiful demon, alone with the soldier in the midst of the tempest, shrunk down and cowered close to the wild beast, covering her face with her hands as if to shut out the sight, while the faint light at the northern edge of the clouds showed that the storm was beginning to break.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE TEMPEST.

WHEN the two men who had intruded into Govinda's lonely kingdom in the jungle began to climb the tree, little Ali was already high up among the branches, and hiding behind the main trunk. The child, brought up in the jungle, had much of the instinct of a wild animal, and behaved toward his pursuers just as a squirrel would do, slowly and silently circling the trunk as he listened to the men climbing, and always keeping the tree between them and himself. Now and then he would peep round over the forks of the branches to watch, and noticed that his enemies were hunting for him as if they did not know where to look. These men were none other than the two pretended bearers of Luchmee, who had slipped into the jungle, and both were of course members of the gang of Thugs that owned Mirza Baba for their high priest. They were, in spite of their mean appearance, men of distinction in their peculiar sect, and their previous presence at the invocation to Kalee showed that they were either no-

ted stranglers or the sons of such, since no common Thug can partake of the mysteries of the baleful goddess till he has killed a victim. These men seemed decidedly anxious now, for they feared the return of Govinda and his tigress.

"Where can the child be, Tantia?" asked one, angrily.

"He must be here," replied the other in a low tone; "for I saw him mount the tree. The imp is hiding. Look up, and we will separate."

The two climbed higher on separate limbs, and began to explore the recesses of the branches with their eyes, being rewarded very soon by the sight of little Ali, crouched against the tree like a squirrel, trying to hide in the foliage.

A savage oath from the Thugs and a rapid scrambling followed the discovery; when Ali, casting aside all thoughts of concealment, uttered a shriek of terror and began to climb for dear life.

But, up in a tree of the size of the teak, the long arms and legs of his pursuers gave them a decided advantage, as they could seize at each effort branches twice as far apart as those possible to the boy, and at last they had hunted him to the base of a long, slender branch, from whence there seemed to be no escape.

With the blind instinct of a hunted animal, Ali strove to protract the pursuit, and the poor little mite clung to the extremity of the branch among the leaves, the slender limb bending over and swinging to and fro with his weight, while his pursuers did not dare to follow him.

"Curse the imp! We shall lose him," growled Tantia, savagely. "Go below and catch him, when I bend down on the branch."

His brother Thug nodded, and scrambled down the tree to another limb, immediately below that on which the child swayed to and fro. Tantia bore his weight on the branch when the end slowly declined toward the arms of his expectant confederate. Little Ali gave a wild shriek of terror and climbed up again, just as a squirrel might do, about half-way between the two men. Then Tantia gave an angry curse and bore still more heavily.

"Crack!" and down went child and branch together, hanging by about half the wood, but swinging close to the bole of the tree, when the active Thug below made a grasp and caught the boy by the leg, jerking him violently down into his arms.

As he did so, the sound of horses' feet on the Benares road announced the arrival of Charlton's escort, and Tantia hastily cried out:

"Sweep the floor!"

The peculiar slang of the Thugs is so constantly practiced that it becomes a part of their nature, and both men understood the signal to hide themselves. Down the tree they came in desperate haste, lugging the child with them, Ali no longer shrieking, for his instinct told him that such a course would only insure him rough treatment. They came down into the clearing, and stood still a minute to listen. The trampling of horses on the Benares road was passing round the curve, and they realized that the escort would soon come up to what they hoped to be the dead body of Charlton.

On a sudden, little Ali, who had been quite quiet, uttered a shrill scream and wriggled out of the arms of his captor, running toward the bushes where Burrhea was chained.

Instantly, the scream was answered by the royal voice of the tigress Seevab, coming to his help from afar.

Both of the Thugs darted after him in pursuit, and came up with the child at the edge of the jungle, when one of them caught him up again, and both turned to flee across the clearing toward Jagpore.

As they passed the furnace, Tantia kicked it over into the long grass, with a savage oath, and then away sped the Thugs toward Jagpore.

The flames leaped up in the grass behind them and soon formed a perfect barrier between them and the pursuit they feared, while at the same time they raged after the two men with equal rapidity.

Govinda, tearing through the bushes to the rescue of his boy, was met by the awful vision of the jungle on fire, and found himself half-suffocated by the smoke, while the rushing of frightened animals through the underwood announced that the fire had already gained enough headway to defy human control.

The frantic father pressed forward a few steps till he could go no further, when he seemed to recognize that his efforts were useless. Seevab was pulling him back with her chain; while Burrhea and the baggage elephant, roused to superhuman exertions by the new danger, came

tearing through the covert, trailing their broken chains and roaring with terror.

With a deep groan of mingled agony and fury, the trainer turned to flee, and found himself in the midst of a frightened mob of animals, making for the tank of Sultan Tippoo, one end of which was close behind his retreat.

In a few moments he was down in the water, with the tiger and tigress crowding close to him in their desire for companionship, while the splashing of bodies all round them showed where new fugitives were taking refuge. The storm-cloud did not come over that part of the lake so quickly as at the other end; and Govinda, with his face close to the water, could see the horsemen ride down the ravine at the other side of the tank.

Then the tornado swept on from the direction of Benares, to the north, and Govinda dragged himself from the water and out over the still warm mud, produced by the rain and ashes commingled, on his way to the clearing that he had lately occupied with his baggage.

The wind howled and roared through the blackened branches of the great teak trees; the rain came down in sheets of water, mingled with hailstones that stung sharply on his naked body; but still the stalwart tiger-tamer rushed on, leading the tigress and searching for his child.

A blinding flash of lightning revealed the late clearing, now surrounded with blackened trees and heaps of ashes. He saw the great teak, where the ladder had lately been, and its trunk was scorched with the fire, the leaves withered to a height of some sixty feet, and only the lofty top towering still unharmed in the air.

The father looked up in vain into the tree for a moving figure.

"Who knows?" he cried aloud, "he may have been up high above the fire, and be still stupefied with the smoke."

With that idea, he began to shout at the top of his voice; and the tigress raised her grand war-notes, mingling with the thunder in the darkness and storm.

No answer came, and presently a broad flash of light made all the jungle clear as mid-day, when a jagged thunderbolt, zigzagging across the sky and darting from the midst of the black clouds above, struck the lofty tree spared by the fire, and above it in twain with a loud crash.

Then at last Govinda broke down and fell on his knees, sobbing out:

"Ali! Ali! my child is gone."

Crash went the noble teak tree, as the tornado struck it at that moment, leveling it to the earth, and Seevab flattened herself out as the wind swept over her, while Govinda instinctively threw himself on his face in the gray mud.

The fury of the tornado passed over them as they lay there, as it had over Charlton; and then at last the light broke from the north, and the tamer knew that the storm was breaking as quickly as it had come.

He rose up, and as he did so the tigress snuffed the air eagerly toward the south, from whence the wind was now blowing with much less force. Govinda started and watched her, for the beast began to utter a peculiar purring sound that she never manifested toward any but himself or the child.

The tigress snuffed still more eagerly and began to tug at her chain, and a spasm of hope passed over the countenance of the trainer.

"He was not in the tree," he cried, aloud. "We will find him yet!"

Then man and tigress rushed over the ashes and mud on the trail of the lost child.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER STORM. CALM.

THE storm was over. It passed off as suddenly as it had come on, but all round the tank of Sultan Tippoo a scene of black desolation presented itself. Only the lofty teak trees were left standing, and they were frequently scorched to the very summits by the darting flames from the feathery bamboo thickets that had served as fuel to the flame. A broad swath of leveled trees told of the path of the tornado, following the side of a hill that overlooked the tank, and zigzagging to and fro like a worm fence. The shores of the tank were strewn with dead bodies of animals, and more than one of Charlton's troopers had been seriously hurt by the tempest. The rest, a disconsolate band, their clothing in tatters, their bodies, and those of their horses, covered with gashes from the sharp stones, presented a sorry appearance, as they searched along the shore for their commander. The lately dry ravine was now a foaming toy

rent, twenty feet deep in the center, and Charlton found that the log on which he, Luchmee and the leopard were floating, was about a hundred feet from the shore, toward which the current from the ravine was bearing it.

He felt for his pistols to shoot the leopard, but the weapons were so wet that he feared to use them and drew his sword instead, with which he drove the beast into the water, having the pleasure of seeing it swim away to shore as soon as the light became strong enough to show where they were. Then the afternoon sun shone out as hot as ever, and he found himself alone on the log with the cowering Luchmee.

The girl had not spoken a word since she first recognized him, only shrinking down into the center of a fork of the tree, as if she were overcome with terror and shame.

Charlton stood up and shouted to his men, whom he saw searching for him, and soon had the gratification of watching them ride toward the place whither the log was drifting.

"See, Luchmee," he observed; "the will of the goddess Kalee, in whom your tribe trust, is that you should be my prisoner. You fled to the jungle, and it was burnt over your head. You escaped the fire in the ravine, and the torrent carried you away to me. Now you will come with me to the Resident of Jagpore."

Luchmee shivered, but made no reply, and the soldier continued more kindly:

"Why did you try to kill me? I never harmed you. On the contrary, I am so little angry with you now, that if you will swear never to attempt my life again, and to give me the names of your accomplices, I will guarantee your freedom."

Luchmee looked up as if she did not understand him.

"It is folly you speak," she replied. "I know the laws of the Franks, and they will kill me. It is just, for I failed, and the goddess has punished me for pride."

"And yet I say that if you will swear to tell the truth, you shall go free," responded Charlton.

"I will swear nothing," retorted the woman, sullenly. "If you wish to kill me, do so. It is my fate."

They were close to the bank now, and one of the troopers held out his long lance, which Charlton seized and drew himself to shore. To his great delight, the vicious but enduring Alborak was there, not much the worse for his buffeting by the storm, though the blood flowed from several cuts on his body.

Charlton mounted and held out his hand to Luchmee.

"Come up in front this time," he said. "I wish to be sure of you."

Silently and sullenly the girl obeyed; the troopers staring at her with ill-concealed wonder, but saying nothing.

Then Charlton set off to return to Jagpore, a sadder and wiser man than when he left Sir Douglas McGregor that morning, his uniform dripping wet and in tatters, his body bruised and cut in more than one place, but carrying on his saddle-bow the renowned Luchmee, Queen of the Nautch-girls, with the reputation of being the wickedest woman in India.

The sun was already low in the sky as they rode along the top of the ravine into the old Benares road, and they could see with great distinctness the place where the storm had arrested the fire. The flames had not burned more than three-quarters of an hour, but in that short space of time they had destroyed several square miles of forest till a black line against the greenish brown of the distant jungle showed where the storm-king had beaten down the fire-king.

They had no difficulty in riding over ground lately covered with impenetrable jungle. The fire had made a clean sweep of grass and bushes, and only the tree-trunks, black and charred, stood like grim sentries watching over the desolation.

Into the Benares road Charlton and his escort trotted, and set out on their return to Jagpore, as the sun set. Inside of ten minutes thereafter it was dark, for the moon had not risen, the stars were hidden by driving clouds, and the eastern twilight is always of the briefest duration.

Charlton kept a firm grasp on the waist of Luchmee, for he well knew that the dancing girls of India are peculiarly supple and strong, and he did not wish to have his prey escape him a second time.

However the girl made no attempt to free herself while they were in the burnt jungle, knowing well that she could not hope to hide from the horsemen.

True to his promise, Charlton took the road to the Residency, and approached the grounds with Luchmee still a safe prisoner. Then the girl seemed to grow very uneasy, for she twisted and fidgeted so much that Charlton said sternly:

"Be still, or I will hand you over to the Sir-dar Hamet, to be bound."

"Oh, Sahib, dear, kind Sahib," whispered the dulcet tones of the beautiful Nautch-girl, close to his ear, "let me go this time and I swear by the holy prophet Mohammed, by the great Bramah and Vishnool, by the great Queen of Calcutta, that I will never try to harm you again! Sweet Sahib, I did not know you were so brave and handsome. Poor Luchmee will be your slave forever, to serve you night and day, if you will only take her to Jagpore, and not before this old man. He is a magician and keeps a devil, they say."

Charlton hesitated. He was young and not insensible to the voice of flattery, and moreover he thought he knew all about the Thugs by this time, and how to control them.

"Will you swear by the goddess Kalee to be true to me and help me punish your accomplices?" he asked, sternly, with a vision in his mind of astonishing Sir Douglas by his revelations.

"I will tell you all," said Luchmee earnestly; and she allowed her head to drop on his breast, while she wept softly and kissed the buttons of his uniform in the most humble manner. They were near the Residency when this happened, and Charlton relented so far that he passed it and rode right into the town of Jagpore through the ancient gates, where he had to knock loudly before the guards would admit them.

Once inside, he felt quite safe, for the people of Jagpore, as a rule, were devoted to him; and as he rode through the silent and deserted bazars, he met the men of his own patrol, who greeted him with a respectful salaam as he passed on to the palace gate.

Everything was alive there, for the Rajah had a habit of turning night into day, not uncommon in tyrants of all countries.

Charlton dismissed his escort and went to his own quarters, followed submissively by Luchmee. Many were the stares and winks they encountered on their passage, but these were all made behind Charlton's back, for the Major Sahib was regarded with great awe in the palace.

Once in his own quarters, he called his *kit-muggar*, or steward, a necessity in all Eastern households, and gave Luchmee in charge to him.

The Hindoo expressed no surprise at the presence of an exceedingly beautiful woman with jewels worth a rajah's ransom; but smiled when his master told him to bring forth a dress fit for a Nautch-girl.

"The Sahib knows that none but the Rajah keeps Nautch-girls," he answered. "I can borrow a dress from the mother of the dancers,* but only as a favor to the Sahib."

"Don't, then," said Charlton, briefly; and then, as the man left the room, he turned to Luchmee, who stood with downcast eyes and hands folded on her bosom, the picture of modest resignation.

"They tell me you are the best dancer in India," he said. "I am going to make you dance before the Rajah, and I want you to observe all the courtiers and tell me if you know any of them to be Thugs. Can you do it?"

Luchmee looked up and smiled.

"I will do anything for you," she answered, softly. "You have given me my life twice, when you might have taken it, and even I can be grateful for that. I will dance before the Rajah for you; and the chief Thug in the room will be the man to whom I throw a rose."

As she spoke, the steward returned with a long face.

"The old woman will lend no dresses. She has the impudence to say that if the Major Sahib wishes the girl to dance before the Rajah he must fee the mother handsomely."

*The Nautch-girls, or Bayadères of India, are a regular caste and divided into troops of a dozen or so under an old woman called the *Dhya*, or Mother of the Dancers, who makes all contracts for them, like the leader of a band. The girls are of two kinds: 1st, Temple Bayadères, who are attached to the temples and execute the sacred dances, as an act of religion; and 2d, free Nautch-girls, who roam the country or remain in the cities where they have a reputation. The most beautiful and accomplished, like the once renowned Nikee of Delhi and Alina of Allahabad, are entirely free and pay their own musicians. Luchmee belonged to this small but favored class.

Charlton laughed, and took off a ring from his finger.

"Take this woman to the *Dhya*, give her this ring, and tell her to let Luchmee do as she wishes."

The steward bowed to the floor and vanished with Luchmee.

Half an hour later, Major Charlton, in his handsomest uniform, his sword-belt and buttons gleaming with jewels, entered the Rajah's grand saloon, where the great man lolled on a divan, surrounded by his courtiers.

Ram Sing greeted the soldier at once, with the most effusive cordiality.

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUEEN OF THE NAUTCH-GIRLS.

"AHA, major, where have you been? Shiver my timbers, ole boy, howahyah!"* bellowed the Rajah Ram Sing, in his peculiar English, holding out his hand. "Had a jungle fire and a storm, and half the bazar unroofed—and—oh, boppery bop! (nonsense). Sit down and take a glass o' sham."

It was evident that the Rajah was already about "half-seas-over," in drinking phrase; and as he was good-natured in his cups up to a certain point, Charlton laughed and obeyed the mandate to take some champagne. It was handed to him by one of the Prince's female slaves; for that evening, except the courtiers, there seemed to be no men visible. As the American set down his glass, he observed:

"I was out in the fire and storm myself, your Highness, and came near being killed. I lost a man out of my escort, seriously hurt, but just able to ride into the city."

"Let 'em go. Men's plenty," hiccuped the august ruler of Jagpore. "Women's plenty, too," he added, with a drunken leer. "Hear you picked one up?"

"Who told your Highness?" demanded Charlton sharply. "Who criticises my actions here?"

He had determined, since his visit to Sir Douglas, to try and provoke the Rajah into a quarrel, that he might find a pretext to throw up his position and go to the Nawaub of Bundelcund; but the Rajah seemed to be unusually good-natured that night.

"It was Khoda Khan," he answered; "old Khoda, that ass, Khoda. Nobody minds him, you know. Here he is to speak for himself. Eh, Khoda?"

He had relapsed into Hindoostanee, and Charlton fixed his eyes on the vizier menacingly.

Khoda Khan cringed, bowed, smiled, and rubbed his hands, as he advanced obsequiously to the American.

"I am sure I meant nothing," he began. "One of my men told me that he saw the Major Sahib enter the palace, followed by a woman unvalled, wearing many jewels; and I supposed that the Sahib was falling into our little ways at last."

He leered at Charlton with his evil eyes in a manner full of wicked significance, and the soldier felt his cheek flaming as he thought of the interpretation put on his conduct. As for the Rajah, he roared with laughter, and cried out:

"The Major Sahib is like the rest of us. Who is she, major?"

"The woman I brought to the palace is a Nautch-girl, to dance before your Highness," responded Charlton, stiffly. "If you will see her, you will agree that I have done well for you."

The Rajah yawned.

"Boppery bop! Is that all? I am tired of Nautch-girls. She must be out of the common to please me."

"She is out of the common," answered Charlton. "If your Highness will give the signal, you shall see."

"Oh, very well," said the Rajah, lazily. "Call them in."

He evidently did not expect much, for the general run of Indian dancing-girls execute the same maneuvers over and over again, so as to weary the spectator who has seen them more than once. Now and then, however, an exception appears, who becomes the rage in a town or province, demanding and receiving as much as six hundred dollars a night for her performances, and being petted and fêted like our own queens of the ballet. Of such, as Charlton had often heard, was Luchmee, who had obtained the name of "Queen of the Nautch-girls," and it was with some curiosity that he now awaited her appearance. He knew that she would probably excite great jealousy among the Rajah's dancing-girls, and wondered whether they

*The Rajah probably meant "How are you?"

would consent to play for and otherwise help her.

He clapped his hands, the signal agreed on between him and Luchmee, and immediately the room in front of them was cleared of people, while the Rajah's slaves stretched a great white cloth over the floor to make a perfect background for the dancer's figure. Then entered five girls, dressed in the most gorgeous garments. Three of them were the musicians, and two bore long torches of some resinous wood, soaked in saltpeter, which burned with a very brilliant flame and emitted a strong aromatic odor. The torch-bearers took their places in silence at either side of the stage, while the musicians sat down and began to play a soft melancholy air on a lute, accompanied by two tambourines. The effect of this odd music was quite soothing, for the tambourines made a sort of dull murmuring bass to the tinkling of the lute, while the three girls sang in low, cooing voices one of the songs of the Nautch-girls.

The Rajah yawned; he had heard that sort of thing often. Still the song went on for more than a minute, and no Luchmee made her appearance. The great, white saloon with its brilliant lights stretched out before them, opening on the broad stone-paved veranda that led into the garden, where the moon was just rising, red and angry-looking, between the marble pillars.

For an unusual time the singers kept on with their plaintive ballad, which told of the sorrows of a girl abandoned by her lover; and then, just as the Rajah yawned the third time, the music changed to a lively air, and Luchmee glided into sight as noiselessly as a spirit, and stood at the end of the room, facing her audience proudly and defiantly, as if challenging their admiration.

The Rajah stopped yawning and stared, while a dead silence fell on the room. As for Charlton, he sat wonder-stricken, for Luchmee, if she had been beautiful before, was now positively bewitching.

The Queen of the Nautch-girls was literally blazing with jewels, and the light of the torches held by the girls flashed on a diamond or emerald at every motion of her body. From the hips to the ankles she was covered with heavy skirts and full trowsers of cloth of gold, but her feet were bare, save that every toe was ornamented with a broad gold ring, set with diamonds, while heavy gold bangles, furnished with bells, decorated her ankles. Her bust was partially revealed by a little sleeveless jacket, glittering with jewels, while arms, neck and bosom were covered with ornaments, and her earrings and nose ring were of thin gold wire, strung with pearls and diamonds. Luchmee's long black hair, twined with strings of pearls, hung down her back, and she held in her hand a rose.

There she stood, silent as a spirit, one foot slightly advanced, a proud smile on her lips, as she looked at the court assembled to criticise her.

Her whole attitude seemed to say:

"Here I am. Refuse to applaud if you dare."

The Rajah clapped his hands vigorously, and shouted:

"Bravo! Bravo! Major Sahib, this is different to the rest."

Then all were silent, for Luchmee began her dance.

It was not like the ballet of Europe, for the Nautch-girls never lift their feet fairly from the floor, except to mark the musical time with their bells. Noiselessly the girl glided forward to the middle of the room and stood swaying her arms above her head, with the rose waving in figures in time to the music; and then began a singular dance, slowly turning round, while body and arms undulated with a serpentine motion full of grace into all sorts of difficult curves. Now Luchmee began to show what she could do, for the dance seemed to be a pantomime of coquetry and enticement. When she came forward with her eyes glowing, lips parted, arms raised above her head, tripping as light as a fairy, not a sound could be heard but the tinkling of the guitar, for her bare feet made no noise on the white carpet. She seemed to be flying a kite, for her eyes were fixed on the air and she moved her arms as if balancing the toy above her, then suddenly stooped and ran back, with hands close to the ground, as if the kite were falling and she trying to save it. She was in fact executing the "kite-dance," the most celebrated of the Bayadères' pantomimes, and the action was so vivid that Charlton involuntarily looked up, as if he expected to see the sky above his head. Then Luchmee tripped forward again and stood swaying her body

back till her long hair swept the floor, her frame as sinuous as that of a snake. Anon she sprung up to an attitude full of pride and seemed as if about to follow the kite, floating away across the room with arms extended like wings. Charlton had seen the kite-dance many times before, but never executed with such bewitching grace as that shown by Luchmee; and he was not surprised to find that the Rajah was delighted.

The great man sat with his eyes riveted on the swaying figure, and his features worked in a way that showed him to be completely entranced, till the dance was nearly over. Charlton in his own interest and excitement had almost forgotten the object he had in view in bringing Luchmee to the palace till this happened, and then the Queen of the Nautch-girls glided forward near the circle, flirting the rose which she had made do duty in the kite pantomime, as if she were hesitating to whom to throw it.

Then Charlton remembered, and glanced keenly round at his companions to watch their behavior; for he felt sure that the rose would be thrown to Khoda Khan. To his surprise, however, Luchmee paid no attention to the vizier, but dropped the flower at the feet of the Rajah himself, and then turned and flitted away from the room.

Charlton started and rose from his seat, for the fat Rajah, intoxicated with delight, rose up applauding vigorously, but lost his balance in the effort and measured his length on the white carpet, where he rolled about, unable to rise. The American, profiting by the confusion that ensued, slipped from the saloon by a side-door and thence into the moonlit garden into which Luchmee had vanished.

He had not gone ten steps when he met Govinda, the tiger-tamer, face to face.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ZENANA GARDEN.

CHARLTON was running heedlessly through the garden when Govinda suddenly appeared before him, and he started back with an involuntary exclamation of wonder when he saw the tall figure of the tiger-tamer. In a moment Govinda's right hand was on his shoulder, while the finger of the other was laid on his lips as a sign of caution which the soldier readily understood.

Govinda pointed through the shrubbery before them into the brilliantly lighted saloon.

The obsequious Khoda Khan, assisted by the slaves, was lifting the Rajah from the floor and supporting him to his seat, but Luchmee had vanished. Then the tiger-tamer drew Charlton back into the dark recesses of the garden, till they were entirely out of ear-shot of the palace, and whispered:

"Have you seen the child?"

"What child?" asked Charlton, in amazement, for he knew nothing of the other's loss.

"Ali," said the tamer, in a trembling voice; "my little one, my boy! He is in this palace somewhere, for I tracked his captors to the gate."

"I have not seen him," answered Charlton. "I have but just come in, since the fire and the storm. Tell me how you lost him?"

Thus urged, the tamer in a few hurried sentences, gave the soldier an outline of the capture of Ali and the scenting of the child by the tigress, and continued:

"I followed them to the edge of the burned jungle and found that two men had carried him off straight down the road to the palace gate. He has been taken by the same gang of Thugs which had Luchmee for their queen, and they belong here, in this accursed house."

"Did you watch Luchmee just now?" asked Charlton. "If the Thugs brought the child hither, she knows of his hiding-place, and can help us better than any one else to get him back if he be here."

Govinda uttered an impatient sound of dissent.

"She help us! She is more likely to snare us, like a witch as she is. Will you never learn that she is not to be trusted, no matter what she says or does?"

"On the contrary," answered Charlton, rather warmly, "she has proved faithful to me since I gave her back her life. She has promised to tell me the names of her accomplices."

"It is needless; I know them myself, for I hid behind their tent, only the night before last, when they held their feast to Kalsee," responded Govinda's stern tones. "I can give you the

names of every one of them, whenever you want them."

"Will you tell them to Sir Douglas?" asked Charlton, eagerly. "He told me he wanted to see you, by the by."

The tiger-tamer started in his turn.

"To see me! Sir Douglas McGregor! Why!"

"Nay, that I know not. He sent for me to inquire about you, asked all sorts of questions, and wished me to tell you to come and see him. I forgot all about it till now."

Govinda seemed to relapse into deep and bitter meditation, as he stood there in the moonlight.

"To see me!" he muttered; "to see me, whom they once drove into—"

He stopped abruptly and glanced suspiciously at Charlton, as if he had said too much before the American; and then, once more, he seemed to remember the loss of his child, for he broke out:

"But what care I for these English? My child is gone, and the Rajah has him. Major Charlton, you helped me once—will you help me again?"

"If I can, I will," said the soldier, earnestly; "but I see not how I can. If Luchmee—"

"Luchmee is a witch, a sorceress, a devil," interrupted Govinda, impatiently. "I tell you she cannot be trusted. No one can—Hal! what's that?"

He broke off as suddenly as he had interrupted. All the time that he was talking, Charlton had noticed that his eyes were roaming over the garden, and that his thoughts seemed to be away. Now he stopped and listened intently. Charlton followed his example, but could hear nothing.

Nevertheless, Govinda slowly turned round his face toward a thicket of bushes that stood behind them, and scanned it keenly with his eyes, as if he expected to find something.

Presently he crouched down to the earth almost in the attitude of one of his own tigers, and crept into the thicket. Charlton hardly realized what he was doing ere the athletic figure was hidden under the overhanging foliage, and Govinda had disappeared, as suddenly and noiselessly as he had come, leaving Charlton apparently alone in the garden.

Then, for the first time, the American began to realize that he might be in a delicate position himself. In the confusion that attended the Rajah's accident, and in his own anxiety to find Luchmee, he had run out into the garden, forgetting that this part of the palace-grounds was sacred to the zenana of the Rajah. In other words, he was in the women's quarter of the palace, and liable any moment to meet one of the Rajah's zenana guards, armed with swords just as sharp as razors, and instructed to kill on sight any man they found in the grounds of the zenana.

Govinda had taken him into a remote part of the garden, where thickets of the thorny Indian fig and acacia were dense and shadowy. Charlton had never been there before, there were no walks to guide him over the turf, and the bushes were so high that he could not see the palace. Striving to remember its direction, he stole through between the thickets as silently as he could, glancing round apprehensively and keeping the hilt of his sword ready to his hand.

Presently the sharp line of the summit of a wall loomed up before him between the trees, and he knew he had come to the edge of the garden.

"It will do for a point of departure," he muttered; "for if I don't meet any women, I can climb over into the city at the very worst."

He knew that the wall before him was the same which surrounded the fortress palace of the Rajah, and that, once outside, he could only meet his own patrols.

The soldier paused in the shadow of the wall, listened and looked round. All was silent, but he saw something moving among the bushes, and a moment later the graceful figure of Luchmee glided out beside him, and stood smiling archly at him.

"Well, Sahib," asked the girl, "are you not afraid the guards will take you and cut you to pieces?"

"Not while you are here," responded Charlton, gravely. "I have given you your life and you cannot imperil mine without being false to your oath."

Luchmee laughed in low rich tones, and pressed closer to him.

"I would not have you hurt for all my life," she said, sweetly. "I told you I was your slave, and I am."

"Tell me then," replied Charlton, "whether

you have seen in the zenana a little boy, the son of Govinda. He was stolen from his father to-day, and Govinda thinks he is here."

"He is here," responded Luchmee, quietly; "but Govinda will never get him."

"I want him," said Charlton, firmly. "You promised to serve me: take me to the boy."

Luchmee smiled in a dubious manner. "He is in the midst of the zenana, with armed slaves all round him. You could not make three steps within the door without being cut to pieces."

"Well, then, tell me where he is kept and who has him," persisted the soldier.

"He is kept in the room of the Dhya, the Mother of the Dancers, and they say he is to be taught to play on the lute and sing with the dancers. 'Tis a pretty child and sings well."

As she spoke Luchmee turned away and stood listening a moment, when she suddenly pulled him, whispering:

"The zenana guard is coming. They must have missed you from the saloon. I will hide you, if you will trust me."

"I would sooner trust myself and my own guard," he replied. "I trust no one here since you have told me that the Rajah himself is in league with the Thugs. Good-by."

As he spoke, he caught hold of the branch of a tree and swung himself up to the top of the wall. As he paused there a moment, the gleam of torches through the foliage admonished him that the guards were approaching, and silently he dropped into the dry moat outside.

Meantime Luchmee stood in the garden, watching his exit and looking vexed. Wicked and wily as she was, there had been something in the generosity and forgiveness of the young soldier that had touched Luchmee's heart that day, and the wickedest woman in India was for the time as anxious for the safety of Charlton as a young girl for her first lover.

As she stood there, the zenana guards, black hideous slaves with naked swords in their hands, came searching through the garden, and Luchmee shrunk back into the bushes with the instinct of concealment.

Hardly was she hidden, before she felt herself seized by a powerful hand which compressed her throat, and the next moment the Queen of the Nautch-girls was borne to the earth by Govinda the tiger-tamer, who had been hiding under the bushes with all the patience and silence of one of his own animals.

He remained kneeling beside her under the shade of the bushes, his right hand compressing her throat while he glared menacingly down at her; and again, as when she lay beneath the tiger, Luchmee quailed and was silent. The garden patrol came by, the slaves chattering away, and passed within ten feet of the thicket where they lay concealed, but the Nautch-girl did not dare to open her lips while Govinda's eyes were on her.

She felt that her deliverance was passing away as the guard vanished, but she did not dare to move, and there she lay till they had gone out of sight and hearing. Then Govinda loosened his grasp and said, in low, stern tones: "Rise and take me to Ali."

Trembling from head to foot, the girl rose and whispered:

"Yes, my lord, yes, oh Rajah of Rajahs! I will take you there at once."

"Not so fast," responded the tamer, quietly. "I don't want to be killed before my time. Describe me the spot, and I will put you where you will be safe, with Seevah to guard you, till I come."

Luchmee sunk on her knees in fresh terror.

"Not with the tiger, my lord, not with the tiger! Spare me that, and I will swear to be true; ay, on the holy ax of the Goddess Kalee, who punishes perjury."

Govinda looked down at her, keenly.

"Did you and your comrades think you were unseen when you sacrificed?" he demanded, in scornful tones. "Fools, ye thought the omens were good when the tigers roared left and right, but ye forgot to look in the grass behind the tent. I tell you, Kalee is angry, and you will have no luck against me or the Major Sahib."

Luchmee stared at him with dilating eyes, all the latent superstition of her nature alarmed at the news he gave her and completely overcome with terror.*

"Rise," continued the tamer, imperiously: "and lead me to the place you told the Major Sahib about."

Luchmee obeyed as if stupefied with terror,

and took him through the garden to where the women's wing of the palace spread before them. Then, from the shelter of a thicket, the girl pointed out to him the open windows of a long, low room, extending from the main building and surrounded by a veranda. This room was but very dimly lighted, and its floor was covered with sleeping figures.

"There is the child," whispered Luchmee, pointing to a group in the center of the room. "The Dhya has him there, and there are four slaves ready to spring up armed at the first sound."

"Very good," he responded. "Go in there and bring him out for me. You can do it without exciting suspicion."

Luchmee stood aghast at the proposition.

"I, great lord! Why, they would kill me as soon as you, for I am a stranger among them."

"Nevertheless," answered the tamer, with a grim smile, "I wish you to go in. If you prefer me to go, I will leave you in charge of Seevah!"

As he spoke, he snapped his fingers, and Luchmee quivered all over as she distinguished for the first time the brilliant markings of the tigress, crawling like a snake over the turf close beside them, the great eyes of the creature glowing like coals in the darkness.

"I will go, great lord, I will go," she faltered; and at once stole away toward the room of the dancers, while Govinda and the tigress watched from outside.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NIGHT OF DANGER.

WHEN Charlton dropped into the moat beside the palace wall he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs in one of the streets of the city, and at once ran toward the sound, fancying it to be one of his patrols. He had only to cross about a hundred feet of open ground round the fort ere he came into the bazar, and soon perceived the torches of the mounted party he had heard, coming toward him from the gates of the city. As this party drew nearer, something in its appearance made the soldier slip aside into a doorway and bare his sword.

It was not any of his patrols; on the contrary, it was that eminently respectable old scoundrel, Mirza Baba, on his donkey, followed by two men in the dress of Parsee scribes similarly mounted, while a couple of torch-bearers on foot ran ahead.

Charlton settled himself into his doorway and waited, sword in hand. He had resolved to arrest this old Thug and find out whence he came; but as the party drew nearer he noticed that both the torch-bearers were armed, and he concluded not to risk anything in the absence of the patrol.

Presently Mirza Baba passed him, and almost at the same moment he heard the distant call of his own men answering each other as the different patrols met. Without more hesitation he sprang out into the street, seized Mirza Baba's donkey by the bridle, and shouted:

"Halt, you villain! I arrest you! Patrol! hither!"

To his surprise Mirza Baba made no resistance of any sort. He simply sat still on his donkey and ejaculated:

"Sahib, Sahib, are you mad? What have I done?"

The trotting of horses announced the approach of the soldiers, and Charlton turned to the torch-bearers (stout fellows), who were beginning to move dangerously close.

"Stand back!" he said; and to enforce his words made a cut at the nearest which induced the man to spring back in alarm. The other, at a silent sign from Mirza Baba, also retreated, just as the patrol rode round the corner of the street and came clattering toward them.

"Take all these fellows in, and put them in the guard-house," said Charlton, sternly, to the *havildar* or sergeant in charge of the party. "They are the same band of Thugs that nearly killed me to-day, and the Rajah will punish them."

He said this stoutly enough, though in his heart he knew well that the punishment was improbable, for Luchmee had by her signal shown him that the Rajah himself was in league with the Thugs. However, he was determined not to let slip the present opportunity for exposure of the infamous practices of the sect, so he sent in Mirza Baba to the guard-house with his whole party.

The old man was loud in his complaints of the Sahib's cruel treatment, and plead hard for his release when they were once inside the guard-room.

"Indeed and truly, Sahib, I never saw the Ranees before to-day, and I know her not. If she be a Thug, she is a stranger to us, and we are not responsible for her."

"Then why did you catch my arm this morning?" asked Charlton, sharply. "Cease to tell lies, old man, for your time has come. Take him away, iron him well, and lock the cell door on him."

One by one the prisoners, supposed to be Thugs, were brought forward and examined, while the guards were directed to look at them carefully so as to know them again, and then Charlton retired to his own quarters, tired with the day's excitement and wishing to sleep. He was not destined, however, to reach his couch that night without more trouble on his mind, for as he entered his room he found a note lying right in the center of his table.

Opening it, he was confronted by the following words:

"You think you are safe: you were never in greater peril of your life than you will be to-night."

There was no signature and nothing whatever to point to the writer. The language of the letter was common Hindoostanee, and that was an additional mystery. Sir Douglas or Govinda—so Charlton thought—would have written in English. He sat and turned over this mysterious missive, and his heart beat quick as he thought over its contents. It was past twelve o'clock; the palace as still as death; and there lay this menacing scroll, telling him that he was already in imminent danger of his life.

It was enough to frighten the bravest of men, and Charlton felt decidedly nervous as he glanced round. He had a large room, rather bare of furniture; with tiled floor, strewn with carpets and rugs; a table and two camp chairs; a divan running round the room. That was all; except the antique lamp which swung from the ceiling by a brass chain and lighted up the apartment. There was no furniture behind which an assassin might secrete himself, only one small window, about seven feet above the floor, and a low door.

"Nonsense!" muttered the young man to himself. "This is some trick to scare me. Let them come; I will be ready." He went to his chest and brought out his revolvers, which he occupied himself in putting into serviceable order, and then sat down in his large camp arm-chair and began to read.

Like many another man, in like cases, Charlton forgot the effects of fatigue on a person in a hot room. His chamber was unusually warm owing to its having been shut up all day and not allowed to cool off at sunset. Insensibly the print began to swim before his eyes, his head nodded and fell forward, and at last he dropped his book from his knees to the floor with a loud bang, which woke him up with a start.

Instinctively he snatched up his pistols and wheeled round to look behind him, so much was he impressed with the idea of Thugs coming from the rear.

But nothing save the empty room met his view as he searched from wall to door, and he felt ashamed of his fears as he laid down his pistols again.

This time he settled himself into a more comfortable position in his chair, with the idea of taking a short nap, relying on his quickness of ear to inform him if anything stirred near him. Gradually his eyes closed, and in a few minutes he was fast asleep, his head lying on the back of the chair with the throat bare and exposed.

His hands had fallen by his side, and the pistols lay on the table before him, when the door of the room opened slowly and noiselessly, and a dark face looked in.

The new-comer gazed at the sleeping soldier for several seconds in silence, and then entered the room in bare feet, as noiselessly as a cat, followed by two others. Had Charlton been awake he would have recognized Khoda Khan, Mirza Baba and one of the sullen torch-bearers; but, as it was, he lay helpless before them, unconscious of evil.

The dark, evil face of Khoda Khan was convulsed by a smile of triumph as he looked at his enemy asleep. He stole into the room to the table and picked up the two revolvers so softly that neither made any sound.

As he did so, Mirza Baba and the torch-bearer stole to the rear of the sleeping man, and the assassins were ready for their prey.

Already Khoda's eyes began to flash, and he was getting out the fatal *roomal* from his girdle, when the open note on the table caught his eye and he snatched it up and read it. The

* To be seen while sacrificing to Kalee is, according to the superstition of the Thugs, to be doomed to disaster and failure in the coming expedition.

words seemed to produce a great effect on him, for he shook all over and motioned to Mirza to read it.

The old moonshee did so, and seemed equally troubled at something. He made a silent signal to Khoda Khan that he must lay down the pistols again, but the vizier obstinately shook his head.

At this moment Charlton stirred in his sleep and his eyes opened wide with the fixed, vacant look of a somnambulist. All three of the Thugs saw the action, though all were out of the field of vision; and all three immediately sunk to the floor silently and rapidly, like so many cats afraid of being seen.

The soldier yawned and laid down his head on the table, resting on his folded arms, evidently unconscious that any one else was in the room.

Then Khoda Khan rose up, and signaled to his two companions, who rose with him.

It was evident that the work was to be done at once, if at all. The vizier held the fatal scarf in his hand, and motioned to the others. As Charlton was sitting, it was not possible to draw the noose round his head, and it became necessary to induce him to change his position.

Mirza Baba took his station at the right, the torch-bearer to the left, and both stood with their long lean hands working nervously in the air, getting ready to clutch the arms of the victim.

Khoda opened the noose and poised himself behind Charlton's chair ready to cast, when suddenly the long melancholy howl of a wolf echoed from the open space outside the fort, and quavered in a dying cadence on the air. The effect was magical on the Thugs as on Charlton. It woke the soldier, but it seemed to strike the assassins with utter dismay.

"The *chimama!* the *chimama!*" cried all three in tones of extreme terror. "The goddess is angry!"

Instantly the burly torch-bearer sprang forward and dashed the lamp to the ground, leaving the place in utter darkness, when all three fled from Charlton's chamber silently and swiftly, as they did everything, leaving the soldier by himself, bewildered and dazed.

He had seen a black, half-naked figure overthrow the lamp; had heard the patter of bare feet; but that was all. Instinctively he felt for his pistols. They were gone!

Then he drew his saber, sharp as a razor, and began to whirl it in circles round his head in the dark, imagining himself surrounded, while he shouted for the guard.

He had not long to call when a light shone from the passage outside, for his quarters were near the guard-room. The *havildar* ran in with several troopers, carrying torches and looking stupid as if just roused from sleep, which was the case.

Charlton's nerves were much shocked by the sudden event. There was something in a secret mysterious peril like that which threatened him which appalls the bravest; and he shook a good deal as he searched for traces of the assassins. None were found, except his pistols, laid down in the passage before the door; and the young man was quite puzzled.

"Why in the world did they not kill me with them, if they wished to," he asked the *havildar*, an old gray-bearded sepoy of many years' service.

"Because they are Thugs," replied the old man, gravely. "They do their work in silence, or not at all, Sahib. Praise the great gods that made the wolf howl beneath the window, for no Thug will go on after such an omen."

Charlton started, as a thought struck him.

"Are the prisoners safe?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer he ran to the guard-room to look for himself. As he had expected, the cell doors were opened, and all the prisoners were gone.

Then, for the first time since he had been in the service of the Rajah of Jagpore, Charlton began to suspect the fidelity of his own men, as he asked:

"Who stood sentry here?"

The *havildar* trembled and turned pale under his dark skin as he pointed to a recumbent figure in the corner.

"It was Moduree Sing," he faltered; "and here he lies."

Charlton advanced and looked down.

There lay the body of Moduree Sing, one of the best soldiers in his troop, with features swollen and distorted, showing that the poor fellow had died of strangulation.

After a series of questions and cross-questions, he found that the men had all been asleep in the

guard-room as usual, Moduree standing guard in the passage outside; that no one had heard anything till the howl of the wolf awoke them, and that then they found the room looking the same as usual.

Charlton, with the corpse of poor Moduree lying before him, could no longer suspect his own men. It was clear that the Thugs had been released by some person well acquainted with the palace, and his suspicions naturally rested on Khoda Khan, as the person most likely to know.

CHAPTER XV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

WHEN Luchmee entered the room of the Nautch-girls, she knew that she was in grave peril. Nothing but the still more fearful menace of the tigress outside drove her in. She knew that the Rajah's dancing-girls all hated her for her beauty and the triumph she had won that night; and that if one of them waked she would surely be exposed. She saw the slaves of the Zenana Guard lying by the door with their razor-like tulwars chained to their wrists; and although she did not fear immediate death from them, she expected at least rough treatment, and perhaps a severe beating with bamboos; for Nautch-girls meet with little consideration in India.

Her only reliance lay in her own silence and swiftness of motion, and she stooped down at the threshold and took the little bells from her anklets as she thought of this. Silent and agile as when she danced before the Rajah, the girl stepped over the guards at the doorway and found herself in the room where the dancers lay on the floor, muffled in their great night-cloaks and shawls.

Luchmee passed between the sleepers till she came to the middle of the room where the ancient hag, called the "Mother of the Dancers," slept on a raised couch, covered with soft cushions.

At each side of the couch but below its level, lay an armed slave, black and hideous, his naked sword gleaming in the lamplight; but on the couch itself, nestled up by the old woman, was little Ali, fast asleep.

The child looked very pretty and innocent as he lay there, with the traces of recent tears on his cheeks, but Luchmee only thought to herself what a nuisance it was that he was not awake. However, her quick wits devised a way to wake him without alarming the rest. She felt a sort of interest in the child, though she hated the father bitterly, but just at that moment fear of the tigress was the most prominent feature in her mind.

Going to the foot of the couch she laid her hand on the bare foot of the little one, gave a slight pull and then stood up with her finger on her lips, ready to catch Ali's eye.

As she expected, the boy woke immediately and looked up at her, without crying, for his Bohemian life had sharpened his wits.

Luchmee signed to him to rise and follow her, pointing to the window as she did so. Silent as a cat, Ali left the side of the sleeping Dhya, and stood up at the end of the couch, looking toward the window.

The grim head of Seevah the tigress was there, as the huge creature, reared on her hind-legs, with her forepaws on the sill, looked into the zenana.

Ali smiled and held out his arms, for he saw the face of Govinda behind that of the tigress; and at that moment Seevah could contain her joy no longer, but uttered a series of loud roars and leaped into the room, waving her tail triumphantly.

In an instant all was confusion. Guards and girls alike scrambled up, the women shrieking dismally and falling back on the floor, the guards running away in dismay, shouting for help.

Right through the press trotted the grim-looking beast till she came to the boy, noticing no one on the track.

Luchmee had fled with the guards, and there was no one to interfere with Ali as the little fellow climbed on the back of the tigress and seized the familiar collar in his chubby hands. Govinda outside gave a whistle, there was a shuffling scramble over the floor, and Seevah leaped into the garden in triumph with her burden.

Meantime, Luchmee, who had fled with the guards, found herself alone in the corridors of the zenana, and began to realize that she had no business there. She had made nothing but enemies that night in the palace, and wished she had never entered it. A wandering Nautch-girl, her own troupe was not then at Jagpore, her only object in visiting it being to join in the

sacrifice to Kalee with the most renowned stranglers in India. She was actuated in this partly by hatred to Govinda, whom she had followed so long, and partly by the fascination which the murderous worship of the goddess Kalee seems to exercise on all of that singular body of devotees and criminals, the Thugs or Phanigars of India. Now she made up her mind to escape from the zenana; for, used to a free and wandering life, she did not covet the favor of the Rajah, and had only consented to dance before him from a species of vanity common to her profession, the desire to score a new triumph.

Moreover, the dissolute and fickle creature had taken a strange fancy to the young soldier whom she had failed to murder that very morning, and had capriciously determined that, since she might not kill him, no one else should.

With this thought in her mind, Luchmee wandered through the zenana till she came to a side door which led into the men's quarters, and this she quietly opened and glided through. Behind her in the zenana she knew there was a great commotion, but in the other half of the palace all was still as death, the courtiers asleep, the Rajah dead drunk and snoring, the guards extended in the passages, oblivious to all cares of their watch in the absence of the Major Sahib.

As Luchmee went on, however, she spied one moving figure, which she soon found to be that of Khoda Khan; and instantly it flashed on her mind that he was probably after Charlton.

She knew that Khoda was ignorant of her own failure, that he himself had proposed Charlton as a victim, and that any person once doomed by the Thugs was sure to be followed patiently and relentlessly, for days, weeks and months, if it became necessary, till the opportunity of execution was found.

Instantly, with all the caprice of her sex and calling, the Nautch-girl made up her mind to baffle Khoda.

"They gave the Sahib to me, and no one else shall have him," said the girl to herself, with a strange mixture of superstition and pity. "If the goddess wants him, I will give him to her, but no man shall take his life."

Light as a tripping bird, she followed Khoda through a side postern into the tower, and saw, with him, the unexpected capture of Mirza Baba by Charlton. When the soldier seized Mirza's bridle, Khoda was not fifty feet behind him, and Charlton little knew how much he owed to the timely appearance of the patrol that night. The torch-bearers had seen Khoda; and, obeying his signal, were about to seize the American, when his own vigorous cuts were seconded by the gallop of the troopers. All this was seen by Luchmee as she crouched in a neighboring doorway, and her admiration for Charlton increased when she saw the dreaded Thugs quail before his sword.

"He is my Rustam, my hero great in battle," muttered the girl, proudly. "No one shall give him to Kalee but myself."

She watched the capture of Mirza and his party with perfect complacency therefore, and only turned her attention toward Khoda Khan.

The wily Thug kept carefully concealed in the doorway till the patrol had passed up the street, when he stole out and followed it in the black shadow of the houses. As silent as himself, Luchmee pursued them all to the gates, and saw, with Khoda, the entrance of the party.

Then the traitorous minister of the Rajah turned away to the little postern from which he had emerged, and reentered the palace; when Luchmee, following him, found that he had bolted the postern door and that she was shut out.

For a moment the Nautch-girl stood irresolute, and then she knocked three times on the postern, giving a signal peculiar to the Thugs, which she expected would be heard by Khoda.

As she had surmised, the Rajah's minister had not got so far away that he could not hear her, and he returned and opened the door instantly, to find Luchmee standing in the moonlight, closely veiled.

"Where, in the name of Kalee, hast thou been?" asked the Rajah's minister, amazedly. "Thou wert to have killed this American Sahib; and instead, he has captured all our party but thee and me."

"Let it go!" answered Luchmee. "We failed once because Mirza Baba was a fool. Leave the man to me, and I will have him yet."

"Not so," rejoined Khoda Khan, firmly. "He is too dangerous now. He knows the faces of all but me in our band and he will tell the old gray Ingleez Sahib that he has found a Thug band in the palace at Jagpore. The man must die to-night, or we are all lost."

"And I say," responded Luchmee, angrily, "that his death was confided to me by Mirza Baba, and that he shall die by no other hand than mine. Try and see."

As soon as she had spoken she turned and fled away down the dark passages till she was lost to sight in the obscurity, leaving Khoda Khan gnashing his teeth.

The minister was the more angry because he felt that the woman was right. He recognized her only by her figure and voice in the moonlight, for he had not seen her face at the sacrifice, and was still entirely ignorant that the Queen of the Nautch-girls and the Ranees were the same. Mirza Baba, who might have undeceived him, was at the moment in prison with his comrades; and Khoda knew that if he himself made any attempt on Charlton's life that night, it would be a breach of the customs of his order which could only be excused by success.

However, he was doggedly determined on his purpose, first to release his fellow Thugs, and afterward, if possible, to dispatch the only man who knew the secret of their calling. His manner of proceeding was very simple. As prime minister of the Rajah of Jagpore, he had free access to all posts occupied by the Rajah's troops; and the sentry at Charlton's guard-room made no difficulty in passing him to the prisoners when all the rest of the guards were asleep. Poor Moduree Sing little thought, as he resumed his walk up and down the stone corridor, that he had admitted one Thug to help others. He suffered for his error very soon, when he found himself seized by strong arms, while the fatal *roomal* choked down his slightest cry, and the stranglers executed their work with the peculiar savage dexterity of their sect. Each had his post, and all stole up behind the unconscious sentry as silently as cats. In a moment his arms were clutched by two, while a third seized his ankles, and Khoda threw the fatal noose. There, in the darkness and silence, died Moduree Sing, the first victim of the terrible goddess Kalee, and then the whole party of Thugs stole away to Charlton's room, with the result previously described.

The surprise of Khoda Khan at reading the billet warning Charlton of his danger was due to two things: first, it told him that there was a traitor in the party, who must be the unknown veiled woman; and, second, it told him that she was no Ranees, but a Nautch-girl. This may seem strange, but it must be remembered that in India, women are not allowed to acquire any learning whatever, the only exceptions to the rule being the Nautch-girls, who are taught to read and write. Thus, strange to say, in Hindostan, education is thought to be a degradation to a woman, the respectable lady looking upon the reading and writing of the Nautch-girl as part of her arts.

How Luchmee had managed to obtain entrance to the room was a mystery to Khoda; but, dogged as ever, he persisted in his purpose. He did not see, peering into the room from the little window high above, the face of Luchmee, as the girl sat on the flat roof of a neighboring part of the palace, to which she had climbed, and looked down into the room.

Nevertheless it was Luchmee who was there, and it was her lips that framed the lifelike imitation of the *chimama* or howl of the wolf, the most fatal of all omens in the list of Thuggee superstitions. She laughed to herself as she saw them run away in such haste, and murmured:

"Kalee! He is thine, but mine as well; and none shall take him from me but thee."

As she spoke, she glided away over the roof to a staircase leading to the zenana which she had found, and up which she had fled. She knew that the zenana was full of her enemies, but she also knew that Charlton would probably search the roofs around his guard-room and she preferred falling into the hands of the Zenana Guards to meeting Charlton's rough troopers. She had already done so much toward exploring the palace in the darkness that she feared nothing more, and soon found herself again in the zenana, which by this time had resumed its wonted quiet.

Luchmee hastily traversed the silent passage until she entered the gallery from which the Rajah had witnessed the taming of Burrhea, the previous day. The moonlight shone into the court and on the iron doors around the side. Before the dark entrance of one stood Govinda, and the door was wide open. Then as Luchmee hid behind a pillar to watch the tiger-tamer, he disappeared into the passage.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RESIDENT.

SIR DOUGLAS MCGREGOR was smoking his hookah after breakfast a short time before sunrise, and while the air was still cool and comfortable. The inhabitants of India, white and black, acquire habits of early rising in that scorching climate, and Sir Douglas was an old Anglo-Indian. He lay in a grass hammock under the broad-spreading veranda, and lazily watched the wreaths of smoke from the bowl of his pipe, when he was startled by an exclamation of terror from one of the native servants that waited near him. The next moment there was a scramble and shuffle of bare feet and the Resident was left alone on the veranda, while the noise of slamming doors showed that the servants had fled into the house and shut the doors on themselves.

Instantly Sir Douglas realized that some danger was at hand, for he knew the cowardly nature of the natives too well to doubt that they had left him to save their own necks.

He sat up in the hammock in amazement, and even his tough nerves winced and the blood stood still at his heart, as he perceived, not twenty feet from him, a huge tiger, slowly waving its tail to and fro, and gazing wistfully at the hammock.

Sir Douglas McGregor was a man of great courage, but he was alone and unarmed. Moreover, the apparition of the tiger came so suddenly, that he had no time to think; and it is no wonder that he turned pale, while the sweat rolled off his forehead in big drops. However, all his fear did not make him lose his presence of mind, so he looked round him with the view of making a rush for the house door before the tiger made an aggressive movement.

He was just drawing up his legs preparatory to a leap, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice said, in the precise, labored English of a native gentleman who has learned from books:

"I hope that Sir Douglas McGregor will not allow the presence of my tigress to incommode him. Seevah is quite harmless, unless I bid her be otherwise."

The old Scot turned his head and met the eyes of Govinda, who stood beside the hammock looking down at him. The Resident was too much accustomed to concealing his feelings to allow any token of his recent terror to appear, so he affected to yawn as he answered:

"Oh, is that you? The man Major Charlton spoke of, I suppose. You have a fine animal there. Would you be so good as to call out for my servant? That rascal of a hookah-bearer has run away."

Govinda looked down at the old minister with a dubious sort of smile, and responded:

"I think that for our purposes it shall be advisable to retain the domestics in ignorance of the purport of our conversations, Sir Douglas. You will observe me, that I speak the English as facile as formerly. I did bring with me this tigress of mine on purpose to secure an interview with your excellency that should be entirely undisturbed."

Sir Douglas McGregor turned round and looked at the tiger-tamer from under his shaggy brows for a moment, and then swung himself half out of his hammock, muttering:

"You'll have what I please, not what you want—"

He had got thus far and his feet were almost on the floor, when Govinda made a signal. In a moment the tigress rushed forward with such an appalling growl and snarl, that Sir Douglas caught up his legs into the hammock with alacrity and dropped the mouthpiece of his long snake-like hookah.

With an air of the most refined politeness, Govinda lifted the mouthpiece and presented the tube to Sir Douglas, calmly observing:

"I beg to assure the Resident that no harm is intended him, but that I prefer that our interview should be entirely private. It is useless to attempt the evasion of my purpose while Seevah is here."

Sir Douglas showed his coolness by accepting the proffered pipe with a slight bow, after which he puffed away in silence for some minutes, buried in thought. At last he said, in a rather sulky tone:

"Well, what do you want?"

"That is the question for myself to demand of you, Sir Douglas. I was informed by the commandant of the guards at Jagpore that you wished to see me. I am here. What would you?"

"What is your name and who are you?"

"Men call me the King of the Jungle, some Govinda, the Tiger-Tamer."

"But your real name—what is it?"

"Dead, twenty years since."

Sir Douglas started and peered at the other in the gloom of the early dawn.

"What was it twenty years since?"

"It was that of a man who hated you English, and never turned his back in battle."

"But for all that, he was beaten, Govinda. He was no coward, but he was a fool. Were he alive now, he would be more sensible, I think."

The tiger-tamer shook his head gloomily.

"Perhaps not. Who can tell the decrees of God? He may come to life again, to the sorrow of you English. What do you wish to say to me? The sun will rise, and I must depart to the jungle—the home to which you and yours have driven me."

"I wish to know whether you will hear reason and be at peace, if you are treated reasonably," said Sir Douglas, raising himself on his elbow. "The fact is that we are getting tired of a person who shall be nameless, in a place that you know of, and we do not want to take more territory on our hands. If we support you and forgive the past, will you stick by the British flag?"

Govinda drew back, folded his arms on his broad chest and was silent. Sir Douglas watched him keenly and went on:

"Don't be a fool a second time, but think over it. If you do as I wish you and your child are on a throne. Refuse and go back to the jungle to starve, or come out to play the mountebank before the present Rajah of Jagpore."

Govinda's eyes glittered and the old Scot heard the grating of his teeth in the gloom.

"They tell me he has tried to steal your child from you," continued the Resident in a reflective sort of way; "and I hear also that he tried to kill you by setting a wild tiger at you. Now I should say that to a man of your race this life you lead must be tiresome—"

Govinda raised his hand to interrupt him.

"It is free, and I am the master. I prefer to be first in the jungle to being second in a palace."

Sir Douglas shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you refuse to promise? It is a matter of little consequence to the Government. I suppose you know that we are aware of your identity with a person whose head is forfeit."

"I know all, Sir Douglas," answered the tiger-tamer, and as he spoke he drew himself up to his full height. "Your sowars have sought me for years, and I have wandered in the free jungle, where they dared not follow. Alone, under the sun and the stars, I have defied the power of the white lords of India, who stole our heritage by lies and force, assumed as they would best serve your purpose. I have made brethren of the wild beasts, because I found them better friends than men. Your men cannot take me, and you know it."

"Then, in plain words, you refuse to promise?"

Sir Douglas's tone was decidedly ill-tempered.

"For the present, yes. I must have time to think."

"Oh, very well—what shall I call you? Govinda, at present? Very well, take your time and let me know."

"I will return before sunset of to-morrow," said the tiger-tamer, gravely. "If I promise, as you know—"

"You will keep your word—of course. All your race, except one, had the virtue of truth in them. As for him, the less we say about him the better, I think."

Govinda laughed bitterly.

"What! Has the Sahib Commissioner Resident found out his mistake at last? Well, it was time. Had the Company treated me rightly twenty years ago, the people of this unhappy land might be prosperous to-day, and you know it. Peace be unto you."

The tall figure turned and vanished round the corner of the house, just as the first rays of the rising sun began to gild the domes and minarets of Jagpore. Sir Douglas was about to jump up and follow, when he was arrested by a warning growl from the tigress, and discovered that amiable quadruped crouching as if to spring.

"It's clear that our estimable friend does not wish to be dogged," said the Resident to himself as he sunk back in the hammock, when the tigress at once rose to her feet and stood looking anxiously off across the lawn in the direction which Govinda had taken. She did not like the increasing light.

Sir Douglas watched her with some interest to see what she would do, admiring, meanwhile,

the brilliant markings of her sides and the grandly symmetrical form of her body.

Minute after minute passed; the sun rose fully over the horizon, and still the great beast stirred not—till the faint sound of a distant whistle echoed from the back of the house. Then, away like a flash went the tigress, and Sir Douglas leaped from the hammock to follow her. He saw her gallop over the lawn into a bamboo thicket that bordered the garden, and there she vanished.

The old Resident was a keen sportsman and his blood was up. He had felt intensely irritated at the humiliating position in which he had been kept by Govinda, and was determined to find out the secret of his retreat at any hazard.

He rushed to the back door of the Residency, kicked and shouted like a maniac till it was opened by the terrified servants, and then dashed into the house, scolding and striking right and left, and shouting for his guns and bearers. A few minutes later, gun in hand, he was tracking the tigress across the garden and followed the trail till it entered the black ground of the burnt jungle.

Just as he was considering about what to do to follow to the best advantage, he heard his name called out, and saw Charlton riding toward him followed by an escort of sowars of the Rajah's guard.

"Glad to see you, major," panted the Resident, who was beginning to lose breath from his un wonted exertions.

"Send a man back for my horse, and let three or four more track this tigress in the ashes. That Govinda has been here, and I want to find him."

"Better leave him alone, Sir Douglas," replied Charlton, gravely. "I've news for you, sir. The Thugs were after me only yesterday, and Govinda saved my life from them. I've found the names of five in one gang, and Mirza Baba is one of them."

The old Resident desisted from his purpose at once and turned to Charlton with a series of cross-questions that soon elicited the whole of his adventures of the previous day.

"You were a foolish young fellow not to bring me that Luchmee you tell of. She's the worst of the lot. Go back to the Rajah, and keep your counsel. I'll have them all now, inside of a week."

CHAPTER XVII.

KHODA'S PLOT.

"Boppery bop! how tired I am, Khoda," yawned his Highness, the Rajah Ram Sing. "Send for that new Nautch girl. By the beard of Sultan Baber, she's worth all the dancers of my Zenanah. Send for her at once."

The Rajah had slept off the effects of his last night's potations of "Sham"—alias champagne—and he was much in the condition of any other spoiled child who wanted to be amused. Khoda Khan was accustomed to these moods and dexterous in finding sports to divert the attention of his master from business, but this time he was a little at fault.

The Queen of the Nautch-girls had disappeared.

"Your Highness is aware, I suppose," he began, "that the woman was nothing but a free dancer from Delhi, and that she was brought in by the Major Sahib."

"Yes, I know all about it. The Major Sahib is my best friend, Khoda. He brought her here. Where is she?"

"Your Highness will have to ask the Major Sahib," replied Khoda, with a significant leer. "He has taken her away again, possibly to enhance her value."

The Rajah Ram Sing started up in his chair, and the veins in his forehead swelled out, as he ejaculated:

"Where is the dog? How dared he? Who am I to be treated like this by a Frank—an infidel—a—a—"

He paused and spluttered with indignation, while Khoda respectfully waited, with his eyes cast down, till his master's wrath should permit a word.

"Where is the Major Sahib?" finally bellowed the Rajah, in tones of intense fury.

"He has gone forth to see the Resident Sahib, my lord," replied the minister, glibly and obsequiously.

This was another stab; for Ram Sing hated Sir Douglas McGregor with a hatred all the more intense that he was dreadfully afraid of the old Resident.

"What is he doing there?" he asked, savagely. "I pay him to stay here, not to bear tales to the Sahib."

"Your Highness is not aware then that this

American is a great favorite with the Ingleez Sahib. They see each other almost daily. The major was there yesterday before the jungle fire, and tried to persuade the Sahib Resident that your Highness's court was full of Thugs."

Here Khoda bent his eyes on the floor with an air of pious and saintly resignation that was very affecting.

The Rajah looked startled and frightened.

"Thugs! here in my court! The man must be mad. There are no Thugs left in Hindostan, are there?"

Khoda smiled with a sneering expression.

"How could there be in your Highness's dominions, with the Major Sahib for chief of the guard? The major wished to give the Resident an opportunity to interfere with the rule of your Highness, to break the succession, perhaps."

The Rajah Ram Sing was half angry and half terrified now.

"I want no interference here and I will have none. I will send this Major Sahib about his business. Whose dog am I to be treated thus? He can leave me to-morrow."

"Your Highness forgets," said the oily tones of Khoda, "that the Sahib Resident has determined that the American must stay with us whether we will or no. He threatens, if we send him away, to order in a British force and to dismiss your Highness's guards altogether. We cannot get rid of the major that way."

"Then how, in the name of Allah! Oh boppery bop! speak out, Khoda—what mean you?"

"The major must have an accident, out hunting," responded the crafty minister, smiling and rubbing his hands. "He told your Highness that it would be well to take a ride daily. I think he was right. Let your Highness order a grand hunt, with the Major Sahib for escort. He shall never come back."

"But how will you manage it, Khoda?"

"Dread lord, he says there are Thugs here. Suppose they catch him alone."

"But there are no Thugs in my dominions," urged the Rajah, looking apprehensively round.

Khoda laughed in low sneering tones.

"There are none here, but they can be found if a prince has a minister who is faithful and discreet. Let your Highness order the hunt. I will answer for the Major Sahib."

The Rajah Ram Sing looked half-admiringly, half-fearfully at Khoda Khan, for that powerful rascal was overmastering, as usual, the weaker scamp. The prince was yet but a young man in years, though old in dissipation and extravagance. He had been a boy of ten at the time of the mutiny of 1857, and had been put on the throne as a puppet by the East India Company in place of his elder brother, Arjuna, who had joined the rebellion with all his heart and soul, and disappeared at the siege of Delhi in one of the final battles there. It was Sir Douglas McGregor himself who had raised Ram Sing to the throne, principally because of his youth and pliability, but since that day the old Scot had found reason to regret his choice more than once.

The boy had compensated for his weakness of character by exhibiting a fondness for dissipation surprising even in a Rajah of Jagpore, and at twenty-eight years of age resembled a fat man of fifty, thanks to regular morning draughts of ghee or melted buffalo butter, and to evening banquets on champagne and spiced dishes.

This fat, timid, sensual, cruel, tyrannical creature, who could smile at an execution and yet faint with terror at the sight of a loose tiger, was now as wax in the hands of Khoda.

"You are my preserver," he ejaculated.

"Rid me of this impudent American, and you shall have all his savings."

Khoda's eyes sparkled with avarice; for he knew that Charlton, who had once been the Rajah's first favorite, had accumulated a great stock of jewels, which he always carried about him, as if in momentary expectation of leaving the country. Khoda longed for these jewels himself.

"Your Highness shall be rid of him, if I am allowed full liberty, but no questions ought to be asked by any one, if the enterprise is to be accomplished successfully."

"Do as you please, Khoda; do as you please. What shall we do to-day?"

"If your Highness permits, I would say that the hunt should be ordered to-day. The Major Sahib will soon be back from his visit to the Residency; if, indeed, the Ingleez Sahib has not made up his mind to keep him for good. Shall I order the hunt?"

"At once, Khoda."

The Rajah's eyes glowed with rage as he

moved restlessly about on the divan where he was lolling, while Khoda Khan silently glided from the saloon to give the orders, which were to marshal hundreds of men at a few minutes' notice for the hunt.

In the saloon were none left but his slaves with their fans, and the great man had no one to whom to vent his spleen in the form of conversation.

As he lay there, fidgeting and frowning, the clatter of horses' feet in the court-yard of the palace told of the arrival of a mounted party, and the Rajah eagerly exclaimed:

"Who is it? Go and see quick! Are you all asleep?"

A rush of obsequious servants to the window was followed by the report that the "Major Sahib" had arrived.

"Tell him I wish to see him—instantly!" cried the Rajah, angrily; and then he sunk back on his couch, and waited till Charlton entered the room.

The American came in with a firm step and an air of some *hauteur*, for he was more than ever resolved to brook no oppression from the Rajah.

"Your Highness sent for me—I am here," was his sole greeting, as he stood before the divan.

"Where have you been?" demanded the Prince, in a growl like that of a surly dog.

"I have been to report to the Resident that your Highness's palace is infested with Thugs," was the uncompromising reply, as Charlton looked straight into the Prince's face. It must be remembered that, owing to the signal given by Luchmee, Charlton was fully convinced that the Rajah himself was a Thug.

He was therefore prepared to witness signs of confusion in the other's manner, and was not surprised when Ram Sing stammered:

"Thugs! here in my palace! Impossible! You are mad! The Thugs are all dead long ago."

"To show your Highness that they are not, allow me to say that I was yesterday attacked by a gang of Thugs; that I captured five of them last night; that some confederate of theirs who knows the palace well let them out of their cells; that they strangled a sentry, and, finally, that they attacked me last night, a second time, in my own room."

As Charlton proceeded in his summing up, the Rajah grew paler and paler, and trembled violently.

"In your own room!" he ejaculated. "Why, then, they may come to me next!"

"Very possibly, your Highness," answered Charlton, coolly; "unless, indeed, they reverence you as a chief among princes. In that case they would refrain from harming you."

"Yes, yes, probably they would," cried the Rajah, hastily. "Do you think so, major?"

The fat prince was quite innocent and in earnest, but Charlton did not know this. The American thought that he was being imposed on, so he replied:

"I feel certain of it, your Highness. Nevertheless, as I do not wish to be strangled myself, I have informed the Resident, and given him the names of the men who are abroad and the men I suspect."

The Rajah looked nervous.

"And what is the Resident Sahib going to do?"

"He has taken measures to find them all, your Highness,"—with a strong emphasis on the "all"—"and within a few days we expect to wipe out the stain of Thuggee from the dominions of Jagpore."

"I hope so, I hope so," spluttered the Rajah, hastily. "The wretches ought to be punished—certainly, certainly—Where's Khoda? What has become of him?"

"The Vizier was in the court-yard giving orders as I passed in, your Highness."

"True, true. We are going hunting, major. You know you recommended me to ride every day for my health. Khoda has persuaded me to go hunting to-day, so you must get out your escort at once."

"Certainly, your Highness; but you will allow me to say that had I known we were going out, I could have ordered the beaters to their posts before sunrise."

"My subjects are ready to go to their posts at any time, major," said the Rajah, tartly; and he turned away his face with a look of great relief as Khoda Khan, obsequious as ever, glided into the room, for the Prince did not like to be left alone with Charlton long.

The American, obedient to the orders he had received, left the presence of the Rajah, and in so doing passed the Vizier. Khoda Khan salaamed with an air of the utmost courtesy;

but there was the same exasperating smile on his lip which Charlton had observed on the day when Govinda tamed the tiger in the palace court. However, he said nothing, and Charlton was compelled to swallow his anger as he left the room.

As soon as he was gone, the Rajah turned eagerly to Khoda Khan, and said in a trembling voice:

"He has been to the Resident, and he says there are Thugs here. Is there any danger, Khoda?"

"None to your Highness. If there are Thugs here, be sure they know their master and kill none without orders."

"But they killed a sentry of my guard, Khoda."

"It may be necessary to kill another, before we have ended our task, your Highness, but they should be proud to die to serve their master."

And Khoda Khan laughed sneeringly.

CHAPTER XVIII. UNDER JAGPORE.

WHEN Luchmee saw the tiger-tamer disappear into the dark archway under the palace, she hesitated to follow.

She had an abiding dread of the tigress, his usual companion; and there was something in the dark passage that seemed inexpressibly awful at night. As she thought of what might happen were she to meet Govinda in that mysterious gloom, she shuddered violently and drew back into her corner behind the pillar to watch and wait.

She knew it must be drawing on toward morning, for she had been wandering about through the palace for some time, and she felt that it was necessary for her to escape from its precincts. In her strange caprices between murder and mercy, the Queen of the Nautch-girls had made a great many enemies. She did not dare to go back to Charlton, though she had saved his life, for she feared that he would connect her with the second attempt at Thuggee, and she dreaded above all things to be taken before the old Scotch Resident. She feared the keen eye and cold heart of Sir Douglas, and well knew that she could not hope to charm him, as she had others.

The Rajah, she knew, had been delighted with her dancing, but she did not dare to seek him either, Eastern tyrants being proverbially fickle and cruel. If she found him in a bad humor, he might order her the bamboo at once, for no one cares to respect a Nautch-girl. As for Khoda Khan and her late associates in Thuggee, she knew well enough that they would look on her as a traitor, and that her life was not worth a moment's purchase should she meet them in any lonely place.

The "Mother of the Dancers" was equally out of the question, for Luchmee felt sure that she had been seen in the room when little Ali was carried off by the tigress, and the girls would be sure to connect her with the attempt, as a stranger, sent there by the Major Sahib with a bribe of a ring.

In short, poor Luchmee, as she sat there by the pillar in the moonlight, began to realize very keenly that she was in the midst of a nest of enemies and to wish that she had never left Delhi.

She began to pray to the goddess Khalee to help her in her need, but the prayer only re-reminded her afresh of the danger in which she stood, and then at last, just as she was at her wits' end what to do, she heard voices approaching; saw that the moon had disappeared, giving place to daylight, and realized that the palace was astir.

Only one way of escape seemed open to her, and that was a terrible one. She knew that there was a staircase near her, leading down into the vaults of the palace where the savage beasts of the Rajah were kept; and one of the Nautch-girls had told her the night before that the keys of the inner court hung at the end of a passage guarded by chained tigers.

Quivering all over with fear, but animated by a spirit which conquered all terror, the girl hurriedly rose and stole down the steps, just as Khoda Khan, followed by Mirza Baba and the rest of the little gang of Thugs, entered the gallery above. She crouched silently against the wall and heard Khoda say:

"The Mother of the Dancers is my friend, and the Zenanah is the only place where no man will dare look for you. This Major Sahib has gone off to get orders from the Resident, and the country will be searched. There is no safety for you anywhere but in the Zenanah."

"But what if the guards discover us?" asked

Mirza Baba, in an apprehensive voice. "We shall be killed by the Rajah for violating the Zenanah."

Khoda laughed low and sneeringly.

"You do not know all that goes on in these walls, Mirza. You have your vails, the mother is my friend. All you have to do is to follow my directions, go to her silently, give her the word and she will conduct you to a place of safety. To-night, climb the garden-wall, make for the camp, and we will have better luck next time. Khalee has not forsaken us yet, for the Rajah is clay in my hands."

Luchmee peered through a chink in the wall behind which she was hiding, and saw the minister usher what seemed to be five closely veiled women to the door of the Zenanah, which closed upon them. Then she turned and fled down the passage into the wild beasts' quarter.

She soon recognized it by the powerful odor, and found herself in a low stone vault, full of pillars, where some beasts were confined in cages, others were simply chained to the wall. It would have been a trial for the nerves of the boldest man, but Luchmee had more courage than most men, and she entered boldly the narrow walk in the midst of the vault, where she thought that she would be out of reach of the beasts, for she saw the bunch of rusty keys hanging up at the end.

The moment she appeared, a tremendous uproar ensued. Tigers and leopards, wolves and hyenas, ramped and roared against the bars of their cages or tugged and bounded at the end of their chains to get at her, imagining Luchmee to be the keeper with their daily allowance of food. It was a terrible ordeal, but the girl dashed safely down the path to the keys, clutched them in triumph, and returned, so close to the animals that some flecks of foam from their jaws actually fell on her glittering dress.

Then, light as a fairy, with heart wildly beating, she ran to the iron door that led to the court, pushed it open and locked it behind her; hurried round the wall locking all the doors, and finally opened the identical portal through which Govinda had vanished several hours before.

She had barely time to open and close it softly, when she heard voices on the gallery above, and stood still to listen behind the iron door, which she held ajar.

"What ails the brutes this morning?" she heard a hoarse voice say. "They make as much noise as if they had gone to fighting. Perhaps a dog has got down there."

This voice, she rightly judged, belonged to the head keeper of the beasts; and Luchmee realized that the absence of the keys would soon be noticed, when the man went down, and that she might very possibly be pursued. As she thought of this she softly inserted a key in the lock of the iron door before her, and had the satisfaction of finding that it fitted.

She listened till the keepers were out of hearing, and then opened the door to admit some light into the excavation; for she knew not where it led. She saw before her a long passage, sloping gently down into the midst of impenetrable gloom, and hesitated to enter. At that moment she heard the beasts beginning their uproar afresh, and the sound determined her. Hastily she closed and locked the door, put the keys in her sash and turned away into the black passage, feeling her way in the dark along the wall.

Not a ray of light entered the cavern, which seemed to be hewn in the solid rock; the iron door fitted too tightly outside. Luchmee glided along, feeling the wall cautiously, till her fingers encountered the cold smooth surface of iron that told of another door at the side; and as she did so, the sounds of the wild beasts, rioting in the menagerie, told her that she had come to a side passage, leading back to the court. At once she realized that it was necessary to close this avenue if she hoped to elude pursuit, and with that idea she tried the fastenings.

The door seemed to be quite firm and already locked. Then the question rose in her mind as to which side was fastened, and she felt rapidly and silently over its surface till she came on a heavy bar, running through staples and closing the door securely.

"Govinda has done this," she thought; and she was right. It was the door by which the Rajah's slaves had entered from the menagerie, two days before, to assist in Burrhea's escape, and which they had locked on their own side at the time when they ran from the tiger, after obeying their master's orders.

Govinda, who had boasted to the Rajah of his

knowledge of the passage, had not lied. This long, gloomy corridor, leading into the bowels of the earth, was the scene of many a wild story in Jagpore, whose people said it had been excavated in former times by one of the first princes of their race, and that it led into the unknown halls of magicians and evil spirits, who had helped the Rajah in his undertaking.

Rajah Ram Sing had not dared to enter it, and the boldest man in his service had never ventured further than the iron door leading to the menagerie; so that Luchmee, had she known it, was quite secure from pursuit in that direction. Indeed, nothing but the fact of her being a stranger in Jagpore gave her courage to enter it; for, had she known the stories told of the caverns she would never have gone on as she did now.

Bold in her ignorance, the dancing-girl left the door behind her, and felt her way along the wall; the floor of the passage being smooth and sloping, so that she had no difficulty in proceeding.

After some practice in this way, her eyes became so accustomed to the black darkness that she fancied she could see the walls, though this of course was imaginary. Still, it so far reassured her that she walked along quite rapidly, only touching one hand to the wall at intervals, and keeping the other before her for fear of running against something in the dark. After what seemed to her at least an hour spent in this dark journey, the way continuing to descend at the same gradual slope, Luchmee's heart began to beat rapidly; for she saw, far ahead of her, a little speck of light. Much encouraged she hurried on toward it, and found that the passage, instead of descending further, became level, and that under the influence of the distant light, she could see something of the place she was in.

As it had been at the entrance, so it was now, a rough archway, hewn in the rock, perhaps ten feet high and as many broad.

But what was the light ahead of her?

Luchmee was sure it could not be daylight, for it showed too yellow. It had rather the character of a lamp or torch; and if so, she would soon come on Govinda, in all human probability; for none but he could have lighted the torch, if torch it were.

As she thought of this, the dancing-girl stopped and had almost determined to go back, when a thought struck her.

"Govinda is a man like the young Sahib. I have made one forgive me by playing the penitent. I can do the same with the other, perhaps. At any rate he will not kill me now, since I have helped him save his child. I will throw myself on Govinda's compassion."

With this resolve, she stole forward silently as ever, but more swiftly, the passage continuing in a straight line, till she was near enough to the light to distinguish its character.

As she had expected, it was a lamp.

A small brass lamp, in a bracket of iron, set in the solid rock, shed a dim yellow light on the gloomy passage, where the soft shuffle of Luchmee's bare feet sounded unnaturally loud from the concentration of the echoes. But, save the lamp, there was no sign of human presence in the dark regions in which she stood.

Stay! there was.

Luchmee felt that her feet were touching something softer than the bare rock, and looking down, perceived that the whole floor was covered with a coating of sand about an inch deep, evidently strewn there by human agency; for it extended only some twenty feet up the line of the passage and all of it lay under the rays of the lamp.

Instantly the quick-witted dancer realized that Govinda or some other person had placed lamp and sand there to be able to tell if any one had passed that point; and already her own bare feet had made two tell-tale tracks.

Instantly the girl fell back and began to consider how to outwit the tenant of the mine. She first stooped down and carefully smoothed out her own tracks with her hand, assisted by the dry sand, which adapted itself readily to a level over all. Then she began to examine the sand for the tracks of the inmates of the cavern.

She had not far to seek. Right in the middle of the passage were the footprints of Govinda; beside them those of the tigress. There were no other marks. As Luchmee beheld these evidences of the man who had preceded her, as also of his terrible companion, her heart began to fail her again. Then she steeled herself with the remembrance of her many conquests over the most hostile of men, and determined to follow. To disguise her tracks was not so difficult as

one might suppose, when those of Govinda were before her.

The girl placed her own feet carefully in the center of the prints made by the tiger-tamer, stepped softly, gave a little shake to each foot as she lifted it, and thus crossed the belt of sand in safety.

When she looked back, it would have required a very careful examination to have discovered her tracks.

The footprints of Govinda were blurred on the inside, but that was all; and Luchmee trusted to the chapter of accidents to bring the tiger-tamer to the spot in a careless mood, not disposed to scrutinize closely.

Then she went on, the passage curving round away from the lamp, and soon found herself in the same darkness from which she had emerged on reaching the sand.

This time, however, she felt more confident. She had learned from experience that Seevah was perfectly under the tamer's control, and she knew enough of the ordinary secrets of tiger-taming in India to feel sure that Govinda would never permit the tigress to do anything more than frighten her. It was all a question of whether she could hide her own terrors when she met the great beast. Luchmee began to think she could.

With the determination to escape from the cavern in some way, and to exercise all her arts on Govinda, if she met him, the dancing-girl stole quietly along the passage, as it curved round in serpentine windings, till a second light greeted her vision. This was revealed at a sudden turn, and Luchmee saw that another lamp lighted the entrance to a great underground hall.

Timidly she advanced, and stopped amazed, for a strange sight met her eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HUNTING-PARTY.

THE Rajah Ram Sing, attended by his parasol-bearer, was perched on the howdah of the tallest elephant in his stud, a creature with formidable tusks, and trained for the special duty of a tiger-hunter. Most elephants are so timid that they cannot be brought to face a tiger at bay; and when one is found to possess courage, it is frequently accompanied by such a sulky and vicious temper, that the animal is unreliable as a beast of burden.

The Rajah's hunting elephant was generally quiet and well-behaved, and this day it had been hastily equipped with its howdah at the hurried order of the chief huntsman, and brought to the door to join in the grand hunting-party, without asking any questions.

The Rajah, surrounded by a numerous escort, the trumpets and tom-toms resounding on every side, the beaters yelling and lighting fire-crackers as they swept through the jungle, was lolling lazily back in his howdah, watching the scene in indolent pleasure, when he first noticed that Tippoo, his riding elephant, was in a bad humor that morning.

They were several miles from Jagpore, out on the Benares road; had passed the area swept by the fire on the day before, and were in the midst of a jungle thick with game, when this discovery was made.

Major Charlton, mounted on his gray Arab steed, Alborak, happened to ride near the royal howdah in giving some directions to the beaters, when Tippoo uttered a savage scream and made a vicious blow at the horse with his trunk, narrowly missing it.

In a moment everything was in commotion. Khoda Khan, who was also riding near, called out:

"Save yourselves; the elephant is going mad!"

Then every one scattered, leaving the Rajah alone on his elephant, for they all knew they were in danger.

To understand the scene clearly, we must remember that a great ring of beaters on foot, mingled with elephants and horsemen, had surrounded about half a mile square of jungle, and was closing in from all sides, driving the game to the center.

In the midst of all this crowd, the elephant, Tippoo, suddenly took it into his head to have one of his periodical fits of rage.

They were not frequent, but they came without any warning, and while they lasted, were terrible.

Khoda marked the symptoms as soon as the beast struck at the gray horse without any provocation, and every one round knew what was coming.

As for the poor Rajah, there he was on this howdah, girthed on the back of the huge beast, and swaying to and fro on the loose skin, frightened out of his wits at the desertion of his followers.

Of all people in the world, few are so cowardly as Hindoo servants when they find themselves in a common danger with their masters. The rule of fear under which they serve is powerful till a greater fear comes to overthrow it, and thus it was with the followers of Ram Sing. One and all fled, and left the fat prince to his fate on the mad elephant.

All but Charlton. The soldier was the special object of the elephant's sudden rage, but he was also the coolest man there. Alborak required no spurring to flee from before the face of Tippoo, but as soon as Charlton saw that he was fairly out of danger of immediate annihilation, he wheeled round to return to the Rajah.

Tippoo had stopped after the first sudden blow at the horse, and stood sulking with his trunk down, stock still.

The mahout, or driver, who sat on the neck, plied his sharp *hunkuss*—a short iron spike with a hook at one side—on the elephant's head in energetic stabs, but to no purpose. Tippoo would not move.

Charlton knew well that the beast was getting ready to run a race of destruction unless it could be stopped, and he felt sure that in such a case the Rajah would run imminent danger of destruction in his howdah. These vehicles, while pretty to look at and comfortable enough in ordinary procession riding, are exceedingly unsafe, owing to the loose skin of the elephant and the roundness of its back, which render it impossible to girth a howdah with any sort of security for such a top-heavy concern.

Could Tippoo be stopped from running mad by a sudden and concerted attack? Charlton thought he could, and shouted to his troopers, men of the proud Mahratta race, very different from the cowardly Hindoos around them. They were all near him and responded with alacrity to the call, when the American firmly grasped the hog-spear which he carried, dashed the spurs into Alborak and rushed at Tippoo.

A moment later all the horsemen were goading the sulky elephant till the blood streamed from him, while they shouted in threatening tones. Tippoo shook his big ears, trumpeted loudly with rage and fear, and immediately turned to fight his tormentors.

"Fight him hard, Sahib! fight him hard!" cried a gray-bearded *jemahdar* or captain, suiting the action to the word by spearing Tippoo's trunk.

The trunk is the most sensitive portion of an elephant, and the vicious brute drew back with a scream of pain from the stab. Then he threw his trunk up in the air out of danger, and rushed at the *jemahdar* with head uplifted, as if to trample him down.

But the old Mahratta and his horse were too wary to be caught, and the long lances of the troopers kept goading the frantic elephant till it roared with pain. The howdah swayed to and fro with a sickening swing, and the poor Rajah clung to the rail, pale with terror, not knowing what to do to save himself.

Still Charlton kept up the attack, his men showing no fear, but pressing the elephant fiercely, shouting all the time, till the blood streamed from the sides of the animal and made a great red patch on the grass.

At last Tippoo stopped short, lowered his trunk, quivering all over his massive frame, and began to utter a peculiar whining sound, much the same as Burrhea had made under the irons of Govinda when the tiger yielded.

"He begs, he begs!" cried the troopers; and Charlton knew that the danger was over for the time.

Tippoo was conquered by having been taken in time and handled with courage and firmness till he begged, the way in which all wild beasts must be treated if they threaten danger when half domesticated, and the way they are treated by their tamers all the world over.

But the Rajah Ram Sing was frightened to death, even after Tippoo had become quiet. His nerves, never of the strongest, were reduced to a very sensitive state by the combined effects of dissipation and dyspepsia.

He began to whine and swear alternately at the mahout, the elephant, the parasol-bearer and the absent Khoda Khan, who could now be seen cautiously returning to the scene of the late conflict.

"You are my preserver, my brother, my friend, major," he cried to the American. "Make the brute kneel. I'll never ride him again. Call for my palkee. Where's that

cowardly villain, Khoda Khan! I'll have his head chopped off instantly!"

The mahout made the elephant kneel, and the Rajah descended from the howdah, trembling through all his fat, just as Khoda Khan, followed by a crowd of courtiers, came galloping up with every mark of extreme haste, as soon as they saw that the danger was over.

"Praise to Allah, oh light of the universe, thou art safe!" shouted Khoda at the top of his voice as he approached. "Oh, how we feared for your Highness when the Major Sahib provoked the beast to madness! That gray horse ought to be killed, for Tippoo never could abide gray horses, especially right before his face."

The Rajah, whose fickle nature had veered over to Charlton under the pressure of extreme danger, was more struck by these artful words than the American could have thought possible. They gave him an excuse for ingratitude which few men are unwilling to take.

"Do you think it was the Major Sahib provoked Tippoo?" he asked faintly, looking from one to the other.

"So sure am I, that I should advise your Highness to insist on the major riding a horse of another color, as long as he must come near your Highness."

"What say you to this, major?" asked the Rajah.

"I say that the elephant is *must*," (the Hindoo term for the sulky and ferocious fit of an elephant), "and that, bay or black, gray or chestnut, he would have struck at any horse just then. The vizier who gave the orders for the hunt should have inquired about the state of the beast's temper before he trusted your Highness on his back."

The American spoke sharply, for he was nettled at the impudence of the accusation.

"And I say that had the horse not been gray we should have had no trouble," insisted Khoda. "Have I been bred in a district full of elephants all my life not to know their tricks? Let my lord mount Tippoo again and keep the soldiers away from the beast and I will stake my head he will walk as quiet as a lamb, all day."

The vizier was one of the shrewdest of men; and, as he said, he knew elephants' tricks perfectly. He knew well too that Tippoo was likely to be quiet for the rest of the day after the severe punishment he had received, including the loss of twenty or thirty gallons of blood from lance wounds. Charlton was too proud to enter into a contest with a man whom he despised utterly, and the end of the matter was that the Rajah Ram Sing went back to his howdah, feeling that the carelessness of his chief of the guards had put him into a very dangerous position, and that Khoda Khan was a connoisseur in elephants. However, the episode of the mad elephant had broken up the hunt for the day, and Khoda proposed that they should follow the Benares road toward a celebrated cover about ten miles off, and go into camp. The Rajah agreed, and they soon after encamped by the banks of a great reservoir of water known as Sultan Baber's Tank. No sooner was the motley mass of beaters, soldiers, shekarres, camp-followers, begging fakirs and Nautch-girls settled into camp around the great tank, than Charlton set about reducing the crowd to some sort of order. Native princes are notoriously lax in matters of this sort, but the American was something of a martinet, and insisted on the camp being formed into streets, with the different classes in their respective quarters. In performing his task, he naturally excited considerable ill-will from the lazy natives, who had been used to lax discipline for many generations; and especially dark and bitter were the scowls that met him as he drove the fakirs or priests into their proper place. These fakirs are a pest in all parts of India, begging their way from door to door with an impudence only excelled by their laziness, for they are generally big strapping fellows. However, Charlton persevered and drove them away from the vicinity of the Rajah's tent, after which he proceeded to set his guard for the night.

His duties were only to preserve the Rajah from harm, and when he had posted his sentries, he felt that his chief was secure from any attack of wild beast or enemy. Then, for the first time, he began to feel very sleepy, for he had had no rest on the previous night, thanks to the Thugs.

Entering his tent, he was soon fast asleep, quite forgetting that, while the Rajah was closely guarded, his own quarters had not so much as a single sentry near them.

But Khoda Khan marked the omission and he smiled triumphantly as he went forth into the fakirs' quarter.

"To-night he shall not escape," muttered the Thug.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAVE TEMPLE.

WHEN Luchmee paused at the end of the underground corridor she found herself under the light of a lamp of peculiar construction, made of solid silver and having three large wicks, which gave considerable light. The glow of their flame illumined a broad flight of steps of very easy slope, leading down into the midst of a huge underground hall, hewn in the solid rock and elaborately decorated with sculpture. Luchmee was not learned; few women in India are; but she had heard of the cave temples of Ellora and Elephanta, and recognized the one before her as an excavation of the same kind.

The rock had been left standing in numerous places, fashioned into pillars of enormous thickness; and uncouth statues and bas-reliefs showed the hand of times long gone by. Luchmee could see all these from the summit of the steps, but she saw something else that amazed and frightened her at the same time.

The whole of the underground temple was hung with three-wicked silver lamps, brightly burning, attesting the presence of human beings; and she could see more than one figure fitting to and fro between the pillars.

The dancing-girl instantly drew back behind an angle of the wall, where she could see without being seen, and watched the interior of the temple; for she began to realize that there would be danger in going further.

It was evident that the cave temple of Jagpore had some other communication with the upper air than that by which she had come, and she suspected that this egress must be into a temple above ground, for the figures that she saw wore, without exception, the white robes of Brahmins, the priestly caste of India.

Presently the sound of distant music that came from somewhere overhead confirmed her conjecture, for she recognized the familiar music of one of the sacred dances in which she herself had been instructed in former days, ere she ran away from the Benares temple to become a free dancer in Delhi. As she listened to these sounds, a plan of escape presented itself to her. She knew from the character of the music that the girls were going through the morning dance of greeting to Vishnoo, in the temple overhead, and judged it probable that the underground crypt might be reserved as a sort of retiring-room for all the inmates of the temple.

She did not yet know the secret of Jagpore.

Minutes passed on; the music waned and ceased; the few moving figures she had noticed vanished, and at last the cavern temple seemed to be wholly deserted.

Then Luchmee, with great caution, her heart beating strongly with agitation, stole out of the passage, looked all round her from the top of the steps; flitted down into the cavern, noiselessly as a spirit, and crouched down close to a pillar.

All was quiet, and she mustered courage to rise and look round her. The temple seemed to be empty for the time being, and Luchmee began to flit from pillar to pillar, to where she had seen the Brahmin priests, passing to and fro. She felt sure that in that quarter must lie the means of egress if any existed. As she came nearer, she became aware of the sound of voices; and she stole on, keeping the massive pillars between herself and them, till she was close enough to distinguish articulate tones.

Then she recognized the voice of Govinda in conversation with another, whose deep and broken accents told of an old man well stricken in years.

"You think, father, that the people are ready to throw off the yoke of this fellow who has the cruelty of a tiger and the courage of a hare?" said Govinda, inquiringly.

"My son, I know it," replied the deep tones of the old man. "Were it not for this Charlton Sabib who heads the guards, they would have swept the Rajah from his fortress long ago, and with him the Khoda Khan."

"This Charlton Sabib is a good soldier, father. I know him well. His guards are trained to obey orders like the English soldiers. We find it hard to make our men do that, here."

"Yes. He should be disposed of before we undertake anything. He is a man from beyond seas, come here to gather gold. Can he not be bribed, your Highness?"

Luchmee started behind her pillar. So Govinda was a prince and in league with the Brahmins. This was a revelation to her.

"The man need not be bribed, nor could he be," said Govinda, quietly. "He is faithful to his salt,* unless his master sends him away. Already his life has been attempted twice by the Thugs, and the third time may drive him from the service of the usurper."

"Heaven grant they may try and fail a third time. But even if he turn against the usurper, there are the English. They will never forgive your Highness for fighting against them twenty years ago."

"The Resident will not oppose me if I drive out this dog. I saw him this very day, not an hour since. He and his government are tired of the misrule and anarchy of Jagpore. If I promise to remain at peace with them, they will support me."

"Is it true, indeed, my lord? Then the sooner we call on the people to rise, the better. Shall we not instruct the fakirs to preach rebellion?"

"Not yet," responded the voice of Govinda.

"The time is not ripe. He stole into my place in the palace when I was at the battle of Delhi. I will not stir until he has returned from this hunting party. Rajah of Jagpore, I will judge this traitor on the throne of my fathers or not at all. I would rather roam the jungle another twenty years than be called a coward. But oh, Kalidasa, the rule of the white man is riveted on our necks forever. The nod of this gray old Resident is more powerful than all the spears of the Mahratta horsemen; and that grieves me worse than all."

Luchmee heard the old priest sigh heavily.

"Is there then no hope, my lord the Rajah?"

"None, Kalidasa, none. I have been to their lands and have seen their strength. We are many in numbers, but we are divided into factions, while the English cling together like bees hanging to the roof of their hive. They have guns and machines of war of which we know nothing here, and their iron roads pierce our land through and through. I went there, after our failure at Delhi, that I might see with my own eyes, and I come back at last, convinced that we must yield."

"But my lord forgets the protection of the gods," urged the Brahmin. "It cannot be that Vishnoo shall permit his altars to be thrown down forever."

"The white man is wise, Kalidasa. He does not interfere with the religion of the country he governs. If I submit to the English, it will not hurt your temple one whit."

"Then in the name of Krishna, dread lord, submit at once," said the priest, earnestly. "If religion be safe, let all the rest go; for prosperity must follow."

"Answered like a priest, Kalidasa. The mollah of the mosque and the white missionary say the same. Be it so; you shall have your tithes and live on the fat of the land."

The tone of Govinda was sad and scornful, and Luchmee peeped round the corner of the pillar to look at him. She saw an old white-bearded Brahmin in his snowy robes; and Govinda, similarly attired, stood beside him at the foot of a rude ladder that led up to a hole in the ceiling. The glare of day streamed down through this hole, dimming the lamplight around, and Luchmee could see a part of the great triple statue of the Hindoo deities in the temple above, which she instantly recognized. She knew that she was under the principal temple of Jagpore. As she thought of this and of the conversation she had just heard, she bethought herself of a scheme to secure her own safety, which she instantly executed.

She had noticed before that the rock pillars of the cavern were full of deep recesses among their carvings; and she determined to hide the keys which she still kept in her sash, in one of the recesses, to mark the place; intending to use the possession of the means of entrance into the heart of the palace to buy her safety of Govinda. She felt sure, from what she had heard, that he was none other than the missing Rajah Arjuna, whom every one thought to have been killed in the battles at Delhi twenty years before.

*Hindoos and Mahometans in India alike esteem it a deadly sin to be "false to the salt;" that is, untrue to the man whose bread they have eaten. In the Sepoy Mutiny, of 1857, more than one regiment was held to its colors by the idea of being "true to its salt" amid the prevailing disaffection.

†The statues of the Hindoo Trinity Brahma, Vishnoo and Seeva, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, are seen in most Brahmin temples. Sometimes the figures are separate, sometimes joined together, but the idea of a Trinity is always conveyed.

Quietly she took the keys from her girdle and slipped them into the gaping jaws of a carved monster on the base of the pillar beside her. All might have been well, had she not miscalculated the depth of the hollow in the mouth of the grotesque. As it was, the keys made a slight but distinct clink on the stone; instantly she heard Govinda and the priest utter exclamations of surprise and attention.

"Who is there?" cried Kalidasa, sharply. "Who dares to lag behind, after the crypt is ordered cleared? Come forth!"

Luchmee stood still, listening. She hoped that the echoes might deceive them so far as to give her a chance to escape.

The old priest called out thrice in vain, Govinda being perfectly silent. Then both listened. No more was said, but the tiger-tamer gave a signal to the priest, which sent them both away from the ladder, exploring among the columns. Luchmee heard the soft patter of their feet going from her, and stole away from the pillar behind which she was hiding. Sure enough, the echoes had deceived the old priest, whose back was turned to her, as he searched busily among the pillars.

Govinda was going in the opposite direction, and silently as a cat the girl stole to the ladder. A moment later she was climbing up, as rapidly as her heavy skirts and loose trowsers would allow, in the hope of entering the temple undetected and mingling with the Nautch-girls belonging to the edifice. She knew that the freemasonry of her craft would probably secure her safety could she reach them, and as she thought of it, a burst of music in the temple announced the beginning of a new sacred dance. Then she looked back down the ladder, and saw that Govinda was coming after her. She was discovered.

CHAPTER XXI.

LOST AND FOUND.

WITH wildly-beating heart, but all the rapid dexterity conferred by her long training, Luchmee ran up the ladder and emerged into the temple, just as the Nautch-girls began their dance and song. She found the great building crowded with priests and worshipers, and dived into the midst of the Brahmins in a moment, without looking behind her. The noise and crowd prevented her entrance from being much noticed, and when she glided silently to the side of the girls who were acting as musicians, most people took her merely for a late comer, the more so that she had thrown the peculiar vail of the dancers over her head and shoulders, so as to hide the more brilliant of her jewels and her face. During her threading of the crowd she had held her head down to escape detection by the Brahmins as a stranger, and she knew that none of the musicians would speak during the singing, however they might wonder.

She did not dare look behind her, for fear of meeting the glance of Govinda, but she was none the less able to satisfy her curiosity without turning her head.

An indispensable part of the equipment of every Nautch-girl is a small mirror set in a ring on the thumb, and with this useful little toy Luchmee was able to inspect the faces of the Brahmins behind her. As she expected, the fierce, handsome face of the disguised prince met her eye one of the first, and she felt in a moment that she was discovered, for Govinda was looking straight toward her. He had even detected her use of the mirror, for the eyes of his image in the glass met her own, a sure sign that his bodily eyes could see her reflection.

Luchmee trembled: there seemed to be no way of evading this man; and she hardly dared to hope, as the low, melancholy song of the girls went on, describing the loves of Vishnoo and Suriya, while the dancers in the circle executed their pantomime. She felt a dim sense that she could hope for no mercy from the Brahmins while Govinda was there.

The song was fast nearing its climax and she had not long to form her plans, when she began to look round her at the crowd of spectators on the side opposite the priest. There were all classes of society there, the humble half-naked coolie in his turban and waist-cloth; the fat merchant of the bazar with his silk robes and cashmere shawls; the haughty Rajpoot or professional soldier, with his long mustache and swaggering air; the sly-looking moonshee with his gray beard and horn-rimmed spectacles; the veiled princess surrounded by her guards; the humble ayah or nurse with her charge in her

arms, her face open to the light of day. Nowhere could the girl see any chance of escape or helping hands, for all looked like devotees; and she knew that Jagpore was full of fanatical Handoos. Her plan had been to escape, as she had done, when in her first bloom of youth, from the Benares temple, trusting to being lost in the crowd; but times had changed with her since then. She was no longer a slip of a girl in the robes of a common Nautch-girl, but a lovely woman in a dress of remarkable richness; and she more than half regretted that she was beautiful and richly dressed, when she reflected on the difficulties it was likely to cause her.

At last she settled on a tall, swarthy Rajpoot, as the man whose protection she would claim as soon as the dance broke up; and she gathered her limbs together for the contemplated spring. She looked in her mirror for Govinda, and found that the tiger-tamer had moved close to her, accompanied by two stalwart priests, with the evident intention of seizing her as soon as the music should cease.

With a coolness and daring that showed her to be no common woman, the Queen of the Nautch-girls suddenly rose and glided into the sacred dance, giving it fresh energy for the while, and rendering it impossible for the Brahmins to get near enough to seize her without violating all the rules of religious etiquette.

Govinda made a quiet signal to the old priest, Kalidasa, and immediately the old Brahmin shouted:

"The circle of Vishnool and Suriya! Form it!"

The Brahmins, who had been standing motionless in front of the great seated statues of Brahma, Vishnool and Seevah, instantly rushed forward, driving back the crowd and forming a great circle round the dancers.

Luchmee felt that her design was fathomed by more than one, but her courage rose with the emergency. Taking the opportunity when she was opposite to Govinda's side of the circle, and without looking where she was going, she dived down between two of the Brahmins, and found herself in a moment in the midst of the crowd that was pushing and struggling for a sight of the ceremonies. Behind her still resounded the rumble of the tambourines, the cry of the girls and the measured tinkle of the anklets of dancers, while round her murmured and seethed the reeking mass of humanity.

As she had calculated, she found herself near the tall soldier, and said, hurriedly to him:

"Help me away. I am sick, and must have air."

The big soldier did not deceive her trust in his nature, gathered from a glance at his face. In a moment his broad shoulders were heaving to and fro in the crowd, and Luchmee glided through the smallest opening with a dexterity only possible to a sinuous Nautch-girl.

And then, just as she was congratulating herself on her escape, she almost ran up against Mirza Baba, the Persian moonshee, whom she thought still hidden in the zenana of the Rajah, yet, nevertheless, there in the idol temple, having escaped in some manner as mysterious to her as hers was doubtless to him.

That the moonshee knew her, she felt sure in a moment. He said nothing, but he planted himself before her in a way to bar her progress, and was imitated by several men who seemed to take their cue from him. The big Rajpoot frowned and hustled in vain, for their further progress to the air was stopped as by a wall by the united efforts of not more than a dozen men in the crowd. Then Luchmee looked apprehensively round, and beheld Govinda and three other Brahmins close behind her, pushing through. In another moment she was seized by both arms, and her conductors began to force her back to the circle.

No one dared to interfere, for every one thought that she belonged to the temple and was therefore under control of the priests. Even the big Rajpoot declined to show fight in her behalf when he saw the white robes of the Brahmins. Quietly but inexorably the priests hurried the girl back to the circle and carried her to her former place among the musicians, just before the music ceased.

With the dance ended the first part of the chief festival of the day, and the people began to disperse; while the Nautch-girls retired in a troop to their own quarters. Luchmee knew that there was no *Dhya*—no "Mother of the Dancers" for these temple bayaderes. They were under the entire control of the chief Brahmin, who held the power of life and death in his hands; and she fully expected to receive sentence for her attempted escape, if nothing else.

However, somewhat to her astonishment, she was taken back to the well from which she had emerged into the temple; and the stern voice of Govinda ordered her to descend. While she obeyed the order he followed her, and they soon found themselves alone in the catacomb, the Brahmins remaining above.

Then Govinda laid his hand on her shoulder and asked:

"How did you get here?"

"I came down from the palace with the keys of all the doors," replied Luchmee, boldly. "If you want to return thither, you must ask the keys of me, for I have hid them."

Govinda looked at her curiously.

"Is that all? Then you did not follow me to practice on my life, witch that you are?"

Luchmee smiled in her most artful manner.

"My lord is pleased to be merry. How can I contend with the omens of Kallee? My lord's life is safe from me."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ENCAMPMENT.

THE motley camp of the Rajah of Jagpore was buried in slumber beneath the glowing Indian starlight. The tents, scattered in picturesque irregularity, from the huge red and white marquee of the Rajah to the humble strip of canvas on four sticks under which the cook reposed by his little furnace, were grouped around certain open spaces, called by courtesy streets; the nearest approach to order to which Charlton could persuade the owners. The huge black figures of elephants standing by their stakes could be dimly discerned by the light of the dying camp-fires, for the moon was not to be up before midnight. Camels lay peacefully around and chewed the cud by their piles of baggage, while the horses were neighing and squealing defiance to each other from their picket-pins. Now and then a loose stallion would come trotting around among the picketed horses, exclaiming kicks and squeals, but these occasional battles were the only things that disturbed the silence, and they troubled none but the grooms of the particular animals fighting.

The Rajah's striped marquee stood on a hillock overlooking the tank of Sultan Baber, and the low shelters of the *sowars* of the horse-guard were ranged in a semicircle behind and on each side. Six sentries paced the ground round it, for Charlton was very punctilious about the safety of his chief, knowing how much he was detested by the population of Jagpore, of whom many were among the beaters.

His own tent, large and luxurious as an Indian marquee alone can be made, stood at the rear of those of his men, by itself, overlooking the whole camp. As we have before said, it was wholly unguarded.

At a camp fire, a little distance off, sat Sirdar Hamet Khan, Charlton's lieutenant, a black-bearded Mahratta, who was devoted to his master. He was talking to Lal Sing, an old comrade, and growling, soldier-like:

"The Major Sahib is a good soldier, Lal Sing, but he is too cautious about the Rajah. We are so weak in numbers now that we have to go on guard three days in the week; and to-night, when we might have a rest, he must needs put on six sentries round that—"

Hamet filled up the gap by an expressive gesture as he pointed at the Rajah's tent. It was evident that the great man was not an object of much respect to his guards.

Lal Sing nodded his head and observed sententiously:

"The Major Sahib is faithful to his salt."

"Yes, and a fool to himself," growled Hamet.

"Not a sentry on his tent, and only last night the accursed Thugs were around him."

"He should have a sentry, and I have a mind to order on a man," observed Lal Sing, reflectively.

"If you don't, I shall sit here all night to watch the tent. Be off with you, and rouse up the Havildar. Tell him to send two men. It is hard if the Rajah should have six guards and his good angel none."

Lal Sing rose up and departed for the Havildar's tent while Hamet Khan continued to puff at his pipe, and watch the tent of his beloved chief, growling Mahratta curses on the Rajah, the Thugs and the hunting-party, the while.

He did not see the dark figures creeping out from under the shelter of the Rajah's tent to-

ward him. His thoughts were only on danger to his chief, none to his own life, yet that was where the danger at that moment lay. Khoda Khan had been joined after nightfall by his Thug associates according to agreement, and they were waiting to find the coast clear in the dark, when they overheard the conversation of the two old troopers. As soon as Lal Sing had departed, the whole gang of the Thugs, six in number, crept out from under the shelter of the Rajah's fly, and crawled on hands and knees toward the back of the unsuspecting Mahratta.

A moment later they were in position behind him: Mirza Baba gave a silent signal, and the fatal *roomal* fell on the neck of the doomed man. They had planned their measures well, and there was hardly any resistance. The pipe fell from the mouth of the old soldier as the *roomal* descended; his arms were seized, and he was jerked forward on his face, while Khoda twisted the noose tighter momentarily, and two other Thugs seized the legs of the unhappy victim and kicked violently at his body with their naked feet.

Not a sound was audible in the darkness but a slight shuffling of feet, and the faint, gasping gurgle of the choking man; yet there in the midst of the crowded camp the sacrifice to Kallee was safely accomplished, and the Thugs carried the lifeless body with them back to the Rajah's tent almost ere the struggles had ceased.

They feared to be interrupted by the return of Lal Sing, and it was necessary to finish their work in silence by the disposal of the body. Down under the shelter of the Rajah's fly, within a dozen feet of the ruler of Jagpore's snoring head, the assassins crouched and twisted away at the noose till they became satisfied that the soldier was quite dead. They looked out into the starlight and saw Lal Sing come back with two troopers, stumbling along like men only half awake yet, and Khoda smiled grimly as he heard them calling the name of Hamet.

"He has gone to his tent, doubtless," observed Lal Sing at length. "It is of no consequence; I will give the orders. You are to watch the Major Sahib's tent, and allow no one to enter. When the moon rises, you can call for a relief. Good-night."

And Lal Sing tramped away to his tent, feeling that he had done his whole duty; while the sentries began to pace the front of the major's tent in stolid silence.

Again Khoda gave a silent signal, and the gang of Thugs crept out. They were still six to two, and when the sentries had been strangled they could get at the master. Quietly the *sowars* paced their beats, little dreaming of the danger near them, and quietly the Thugs crept along the earth. The six had stripped off their white garments, so that their brown bodies might be invisible in the darkness, and owing to the sandy nature of the ground, trampled up by the horse and elephant tracks, their precaution was successful.

Not a sound escaped them till they were within reach of the doomed sentries. Then there was a sudden startled cry, instantly choked, as the poor wretches found themselves seized by the arms while the noose was round their necks, and thrown down on their faces to the earth, each with a strong man kneeling on his back, twisting at the fatal *roomal* with savage ferocity. There was a slight scuffle as the doomed *sowars* kicked violently out at the earth, but the assassins understood their business too well and maintained their gripe till the victims were entirely lifeless.

Then Khoda Khan arose, and said in a low voice:

"Take care of the straw."

It was the slang signal to dispose of the bodies for the time, till a regular grave could be dug; and it was obeyed instantly, the bodies of the murdered sentries being carried to the corpse of Hamet Khan, and laid side by side under the tent-fly of the sleeping Rajah of Jagpore.

Then the whole gang walked boldly over to the tent of Charlton, and entered it. Their time had come at last.

There lay the American, on his back on a camp bed, sleeping as peacefully as an infant, and Khoda tied the knot afresh in his *roomal* as he looked at him.

"At last Kallee is gracious," whispered the Thug. "He has a lac of rupees in jewels in his girdle. Sweep the floor."

Again was the slang signal understood, for the Thugs assumed their proper places to perform their deadly office to the best advantage as they surrounded the couch of the sleeping victim.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BARGAIN SEALED.

WHEN Luchmee had made her last wheedling reply to Govinda, the tiger-tamer regarded her for some seconds with profound attention.

"You say that my life is safe from you!" he repeated in a questioning tone. "Yet you know that I killed your father. How can you forego your vengeance? You are deceiving me."

"If my lord knew the customs of Thuggee," replied the dancer, impressively, "he would be aware that they never commit murder."*

She spoke with such entire innocence and good faith that Govinda stared, half-amazed and incredulous.

"Never commit murders!" he echoed. "Why, what do you call your work, then?"

"The worship of Kalee," answered Luchmee, firmly. "If we were murderers we should use poison, the knife, any of a hundred methods, but not so is Kalee worshiped. No drop of blood profanes her altars, and the victim is sent to Paradise. A murderer is haunted forever by the spirit of his victim, but no Thug was ever followed by an avenging ghost, for he slays only those whom the goddess tells him to kill."

"And did Kalee tell you to murder me?" sternly asked Govinda, with his hand on her shoulder.

Luchmee's eyes sought the floor as she murmured:

"I thought so when the tigers roared right and left, but I knew not that you saw the incantation. That is fatal to us all, unless we give up our design. Some of us will be slain within a year from that night."

"And therefore you see that the goddess deceived you and is a liar like yourself," said Govinda, scornfully. "Well, I do not wish to kill you. To say truth, I am half-sorry that my blow killed your father, for he was a stout fellow; but he missed his spring at my horse, and I cut him down instinctively, ere I remembered what I was doing. Well, as I said, I will let you have your life, but only on one condition. You must swear on the holy *kussee* to reveal all. Otherwise I give you up to my Brahmin friends here. Will you swear on the *kussee*?"

Luchmee trembled now in good earnest, for Govinda was offering her a choice of evils. If he gave her up to the Brahmins, she knew they would bury her alive. She had been a temple-Nautch-girl at Benares, and had run away to a Moslem city. She knew that they would never forgive her that, for a temple-dancer of India is under vows like a nun, and the Brahmins never allow them to leave the temple under pain of death. Luchmee had escaped to defy their power in Delhi, where the Hindoos are in the minority, and she had not been afraid to venture to Jagpore; for, outside of the temples she did not fear the priests. But here in the crypt of Jagpore, she knew well that she was utterly in the power of the Brahmins, and she trembled at the thought of their cold-blooded cruelty.

On the other hand she knew that if she swore on the *kussee*, the sacred pick-axe of the Goddess Kalee, wherewith the graves of the victims are dug, that she must forever forego her vengeance on Govinda, whom she was trying to deceive. The oath on the *kussee* is the only oath a Thug dare not violate. He may swear by Mohammed if a Moslem, by Brahma if a Hindoo, and laugh at the simplicity that believes his oath, but in the service of Kalee religion seems to be replaced by an overmastering superstition on one subject. To a Thug, Kalee is more fearful than the God of the Universe, because she seems to his ideas to be nearer, and more merciless. The *kussee* is her particular instrument; it is forged, tempered and consecrated with mystic ceremonies of fearful import; and is only intrusted to one man in the gang, one of pure and blameless life. To drop it or expose it to the view of the profane is to secure disaster, and the Thugs believe that it excavates graves without making any noise.

To swear on the *kussee* is as solemn to a Thug as for a conscientious Roman Catholic to take oath on the sacrament, and the oath has never been known to be broken.

Govinda marked her hesitation, and sternly inquired: "Well, shall I call Kalidasa?"

* The singular delusion of the Thugs on this subject is shown in the cross-examination of Thug informers in 1832 by Capt. Sleeman, head of Thug police and suppressor of the worst features of the system. They all seemed to be unable to see any crime in their actions unless they had disregarded the omens, and all maintained that pity for age, sex or beauty was utterly powerless to prevent a murder if the omens were favorable. The omens, in their view, were the direct commands of the goddess, to disobey which was the only sin possible to a Thug.

"My lord," stammered the Nautch-girl, "there is no *kussee* here, on which to be sworn."

"You are wrong," replied Govinda, firmly. "I dug up the *kussee* of your party in the jungle by the tent where you held your incantation, and it is here."

As he spoke he produced the implement from under his robe. It was a small tool, something like a pickax-head, without any wooden handle; one end broad like a spade, the other pointed. It did not weigh more than two pounds, and yet with this little tool the Thugs excavate all their graves.

When Luchmee saw that she trembled and fell on her knees, for all the terrors of Thug superstition crowded over her.

"Swear on the holy *kussee* that you will tell me all you know of your late friends and help me to find them," said the deep voice of Govinda, holding the implement before her eyes.

She trembled and made no reply.

"Very well, then Kalidasa shall give you to the Brahmins and they shall bury you beneath the temple floor," said Govinda, sternly.

Luchmee looked up, trembling, at the ceiling. The great cavern was round her and there seemed no escape for her from the oath which denied her the vengeance of a life. Suddenly she started up and fled away among the pillars like a hunted animal seeking desperately and blindly for a way to escape. Govinda did not offer to pursue her, but smiled scornfully at her efforts as he walked across to a low passage at the opposite side; the egress from the cavern toward the jungle of which Rajah Ram Sing had spoken from hearsay when he turned out Burrhea.

As he had expected, Luchmee found this passage and fled wildly down it in the blind hope of escape, while the tiger-tamer followed more leisurely.

The girl could see the streak of daylight at the end of this cavern that told of the open country, and she thought that, once there, she could defy Govinda and the Brahmins.

She knew herself fleet of foot beyond most men, from her long training as a dancer, and trusted to her speed to escape.

Away she went through the passage, followed by the tiger-tamer, the light getting nearer and nearer, till all at once she dashed out into the open air to find herself in a hollow place, overgrown with rank green grass and bushes, where the soft ground showed the presence of water near by, and where the dark green of the leaves of trees and vines tangled overhead evinced that the hot summer of India was powerless in that region to parch the ground.

Luchmee had barely time to note this, and to think on the reason, as she remembered that the passage from the palace had been descending all the way till it reached the level of the marsh. The next moment she shrunk back in terror to the mouth of the cavern as she heard the growl of the tigress Seevah, and noted that the brute was chained to a tree right before the entrance, while little Ali lay asleep on the carpet beside her.

Then at last Luchmee gave way and sunk on her knees, murmuring:

"Kalee! Kalee! Why hast thou left thy servant?"

There she remained, half-stupid with the reaction, till she heard the step of Govinda, and felt the hand of the tamer on her arm.

"Well, girl, are you ready to swear, or shall I send you back to Kalidasa?" asked he, sternly.

"I am ready, my lord," she faltered, quite broken down at last.

"Swear then," said the stern voice above her, "to serve me and obey my orders against all your comrades, to discover their names, help me thwart all their plans and renounce the practice of Thuggee forever."

"I swear," said the woman, submissively.

"Lay your hand on the weapon of Kalee, and swear it word by word after me," responded Govinda, sternly.

Quiet and docile, now that escape was hopeless, the Queen of the Nautch-girls obeyed him; and then Govinda threw the pickax contemptuously away. It had served his purpose.

"Tell me all that has happened to you," he said. "I can trust you now."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRUE RAJAH.

LUCHMEE was completely subdued, for there is nothing more remarkable in the whole system of Thuggee than the suddenness with which it breaks down under the influence of superstition. As submissively as a slave the girl related to Govinda her adventures of the past night and

morning, how she had saved Charlton's life from the Thugs, and how she had met Mirsa Baba in the temple above, after she had seen him enter the zenanah, veiled like a woman.

Govinda frowned when he heard this.

"In the temple!" he muttered. "He must have friends there."

When she told him of the appointment made by Khoda Khan to meet the other Thugs in the Rajah's camp, he observed:

"Ay, ay, they want the young major badly, but we will be too much for them yet. The Rajah must be going to the tank of Sultan Baber."

When she had finished her story, he stood considering for some minutes, and at last said:

"Do you know where you are?"

"I do not know, my lord, but I can guess. Near the Benares road."

"Yes. This is the only spot the fire did not touch, and we are surrounded by the ashes of the burnt jungle. The passage stands in danger of discovery if any one comes this way, following my tracks through the ashes. We must depart from here while we have time. Will you come or remain here?"

"I will follow my lord wherever he goes, however far it be," said the Nautch-girl, submissively.

"It will not be far," he responded. "The belt of ashes is narrow here, and once in the free jungle we are safe from any and all pursuers. Besides, I must find a tiger I lost yesterday."

Luchmee shuddered.

"And am I to follow after tigers?"

"Why not? You ought to know Seevah by this time, for you have seen her often enough. Go to her and stroke her. She will not hurt you now while I am by. See, she has not even wakened Ali. I never should have lost the boy had I left him with her."

Emboldened by his words and example, Luchmee went over to the tigress and was encouraged by finding that the grim-looking creature was really fond of being caressed, arching her huge back and rattling her throat in a purr that sounded like a roar in its infancy. Little Ali heard the sound, stretched himself and woke up with a smile, which continued when he saw Luchmee.

The child was fond of beautiful things, and Luchmee was so splendid that she took his fancy immediately. Moreover, he connected her in some manner with his escape from the zenanah on the previous evening and imagined her to be some friend of his father. Luchmee with all her faults was a thorough woman, and the sight of the child moved her greatly. She stretched out her arms and the boy came to her willingly enough. Then she picked him up, turned to Govinda and said:

"I am ready, my lord."

There was something in the wild life of the jungle that pleased her fickle fancy, fond as she was of change; and she seemed to be quite content to obey and follow the man whom she had been swearing to destroy two days ago.

Govinda laughed as he unchained his tigress and looked at Luchmee carrying the child.

"By my father's beard we make quite a party for the road," he remarked. "If we fail in all else, we can always go to the circus again. Come along."

The strange-looking party—man, woman, tigress and child—turned away from the mouth of the cavern and penetrated the thickets at the foot of the rocks. As Govinda had said they were in a sort of island amid the burnt jungle, formed by the springs in that place, which had preserved the foliage from scorching and catching fire, though the edge of the thicket was all withered and blackened by the flames.

Not more than half a mile off were the glittering waters of the tank of Sultan Tippoo, lying in the midst of the gray expanse of ashes, girdled with black trees, pointing their skeleton arms to the sky.

Over the ashes, in a great mob of elephants, camels and horsemen, followed by a rabble on foot, moved the hunting party of the Rajah of Jagpore, just passing the tank and entering the unburnt jungle beyond.

Govinda drew back into the thicket.

"We must not be seen," was all he said.

An hour before that, had such a chance of escape offered itself to Luchmee, she would have embraced it eagerly, by running out to claim the attention of the hunters. Now, bound by her oath and apparently reconciled to her fate, she remained quietly under cover till the last of the party had vanished into the jungle. Govinda shook his hand at the retreating spectacle with a bitter smile, ejaculating:

"Take thine ease while thou mayest, usurper. The time of retribution draws nigh."

"When my lord the Rajah Arjuna shall mount the throne of old Govinda Ram Sing," said Luchmee, softly, as if to complete the sense of his words.

Govinda started and turned to her, frowning.

"How know you my name and rank?"

"I heard the priest Kalidasa call you highness, I saw that he and his brethren were under your orders and I knew the rest before at Delhi."

"Knew what?"

"Knew that the Rajah Arjuna was not killed by the Ingleez Sahibs in the battle, but escaped to Nepaul. I knew that, but nothing beyond it. How came my lord to come back here as a mountebank?"

"'Tis soon told, Luchmee," he answered, sighing. "When my last hope of success had fled, I gathered all my jewels and escaped to Nepaul, where I staid for near a year. It was then I determined to escape to England itself in disguise and see for myself what were the reasons of our defeat. I went there and returned a wiser man. It was then that I turned my skill as a tamer of tigers to account, to hide the Rajah Arjuna forever. I succeeded, and to-day none know who I am, save you and the Brahmins here. I have determined to resume the throne at all hazards; and let the English attack me then if they will. I will at least die fighting, like Sultan Tippoo before me. They have robbed my poor people long enough to please my brother, who has leaped into my place and plundered those he should protect."

"There will be no fear of the English hurting you," said Luchmee, confidently. "The present Rajah has hardly a friend even among his slaves, and the American Sahib is the only man that saves him from death."

"He will not have the American Sahib, long," responded Govinda, thoughtfully; "unless we can save him to-night. He will be tired and sleepy, and there may be Thugs among his guards who will betray him."

"Not so," said Luchmee, positively. "I came here with a list of all Thugs in this town given me by the successor of my father, Buksha Khan, and there are but ten, all told."

"Then let us on," said Govinda, impatiently. "They will not attempt to kill him before dark, and I must find my poor wounded Burrhea."

The little party left the thicket and crossed the margin of gray ashes that lay between them and the tank of Sultan Tippee. The fire had halted about half-way up one side of the tank, beaten down by the tornado, and they found Burrhea just where Govinda had expected, lying nearly exhausted by the water-side, his broken chain trailing beside him.

The wounded brute had been somewhat scorched and singed in the fire, but he seemed to be positively glad to see them, for he associated their visit with food he was too weak to hunt.

Govinda produced from under his long Brahmin's robe a piece of boiled meat, which he had evidently brought with him in the expectation of finding the tiger.

Burrhea eat the meat eagerly and followed them afterward without much difficulty though slowly. Govinda had lost in the jungle fire all his apparatus but the whip he carried in his hand, so that he was not sorry to find the once ferocious Burrhea so much cowed. Had the beast been unruly he might have been in a disagreeable place without his irons.

Taking the broken chain in his hand and followed by the tigress, woman and child, Govinda plunged into the jungle on the track of the Rajah Ram Sing.

CHAPTER XXV.

JUST IN TIME.

It was about sunset when the little party of the tiger-tamer, Prince Govinda or Rajah Arjuna, whichever he might be called, paused in the thick jungle by the edge of the tank of Sultan Baber. They had followed the trail of the hunting-party at a respectful distance, and now they went into their own little camp at the opposite side of the tank from that occupied by the Jag-pore rabble. Govinda retired into the midst of a thicket where the cover would hide their fire when they made it from any possibility of view, and there transferred the chain from See-vah's collar to that of Burrhea, whom he fastened to a tree. From under the same ample Brahminical robe which had already produced

Burrhea's dinner he took a bag of boiled rice, the contents of which he gave to the tigress to eat, being careful to allow her no meat while she was out loose in the jungle. Then when he saw that she was not satisfied, he boldly walked with her into the Rajah's camp, where his presence and escort produced a decided sensation. He was not known as the tamer on account of his changed dress and the gathering darkness, but he was looked on as a very holy Brahmin of such remarkable purity of life that the wild tigers obeyed him.

In this character he knew that he was secure of a welcome from the lower classes of the Hindoos, who are overrun with superstitions. Like many another Brahmin before him with a tame tiger, he walked through the camp, and whenever he saw a *lotah* or brass kettle on the fire he would take it off to find if it contained any rice, and coolly give it to the tigress. The impudence of Brahmins and Fakirs is alike wonderful, and he was encouraged by the behavior of the superstitious natives, who simply gathered up and refilled their *lotahs*, as soon as the tigress had licked them clean, without grumbling.

In making his excursion Govinda accomplished two objects. He surveyed the Rajah's camp without exciting any suspicion, and he filled the stomach of his tigress, an equally essential point for the safety of his party. Seevah had been pampered so long that hunger made her cross, and the tamer did not relish the idea of leaving his child in close contact to a famished tigress. As soon as he saw that she was completely glutted and inclined to be lazy, he turned away from the camp and went back to his own bivouac, where he found Luchmee trembling with fear at the darkness and the presence of the tiger Burrhea beside her, only guarded by a chain.

Govinda smiled at her terror.

"Look at Ali," he said. "The child knows he is safe. Burrhea will harm none of our party now. But we will make a fire and have some supper. Afterward you will feel more courageous."

In a very short time, a small hot fire of dried bamboos was sputtering and blazing away at the foot of a tree, and Govinda showed that he had not forgotten his friends in his excursion to the camp, for he brought out a quantity of miscellaneous food from the rice bag, which he had replenished in the Rajah's camp.

When they had all eaten he said to Ali:

"You must stay here, my child, with Seevah to guard you, for I am going away."

"May the beautiful Renee stay too?" asked Ali, wistfully.

"Not to-night, my boy. She must come with me."

The little fellow made no further objection. He was used to the rôle of passive obedience.

Luchmee made no objection either, for she felt relieved at the idea she was not expected to remain with the two tigers; and a few minutes later the tamer and the Nautch-girl had left the child by the fire and were on the way to the camp in the darkness. Before they went, Govinda stripped off his long robe, leaving his body only clothed in the habiliments of his circus performances, and wrapped Ali in the folds of the thin cotton to protect the child from the night air. Luchmee left her upper skirt of heavy gold cloth by the fireside and proceeded on her way in the light trousers and jacket worn by the Nautch-girls at exercise.

Thus equipped, they were both ready for active work, and glided through the jungle as noiselessly as cats. Govinda, guided by the experience of his recent trip, had no difficulty in reaching the outer camp, which he found already buried in slumber to all appearance.

Fakir and coolie, groom and water-bearer, shekarree and falconer, lay around their fires, or under their little awnings, snoring peacefully, though it was not two hours from sunset; for in India the rule is early to bed and early to rise.

They passed silently through the camp without exciting any attention till they came to the Rajah's tent, when they were at once challenged and warned off by the chain of sentries, established by Charlton between the Rajah and his people.

This was an unexpected obstacle, and compelled them to retrace their steps, skirting round till they could flank the sentries; so that it was fully half an hour before they found themselves in rear of the quarters of the Rajah's guards who were all fast asleep.

Govinda had noted the position of Charlton's tent, and as his only object was to warn the sleeping officer to be careful of his life against the Thugs, he went straight toward the mar-

quee. Presently he heard the sound of voices, and made a sign to Luchmee to stop; when they overheard the conversation before recorded between Hamet Khan and Lal Sing. As soon as Lal Sing departed for the sentries, Govinda made a motion to rise, when he was arrested by the sight of the moving figures of the Thugs that glided out from the shelter of the Rajah's fly. All of Charlton's six sentries in front could not keep out the danger that lurked in the great man's rear.

He lay still close to the earth, within twenty feet of poor Hamet Khan, and saw the murder executed in silence. He was almost about to spring up at one time when Luchmee gripped his arm, and whispered:

"Too late; you will die too. They spare no witness."

Govinda felt the force of the hurried advice, for both he and his companion were unarmed.

"Rouse the sowars," whispered Luchmee, as he hesitated what to do.

"I dare not," he returned in the same tone. "They would save him, and take us. Oh, if Seevah were here."

As he spoke the fate of Hamet Khan was sealed, as the Thugs bore his body silently away, and Govinda plucked Luchmee by the arm, whispering:

"To his tent, quick! We can rouse him at least or save him."

The girl said not a word, but followed him as he crept rapidly away to the tent, which he reached just as Lal Sing came blundering up with his two sleepy sentries. The tiger-tamer and the Nautch-girl glided under the cover of the doorway and entered the tent safely, without being noticed.

Then Govinda stepped rapidly over to Charlton, whose body he could just see against the white sheets of his bed, and shook him firmly by the shoulder, with the instant whisper:

"'Tis I, Govinda. The Thugs are coming! Where are your weapons?"

Charlton was too old a soldier to wake up stupidly.

"Two revolvers on the table," he whispered back. "Take one and give me the other."

Govinda's hands swept the weapons from the table, as he replied, under his breath:

"Lie flat on your back, and they cannot use the roomal. Don't sit up, for your life, but shoot. I'll hide."

Charlton cocked his pistol and lay down as directed, breathing heavily, as if asleep, while Govinda crouched at the head of the bed. As he did so, the tiger-tamer felt Luchmee next to him, and she took his hand and guided it to her own, when he found that she had possessed herself of a saber in the darkness.

They had hardly settled themselves when they heard a soft scuffling outside, and Charlton was about to rise, when Govinda whispered:

"For your life, no! They must be marked, or they will all escape."

Charlton did not know the meaning of the scuffle outside. Had he suspected the fate of his poor sentries, all Govinda's caution would not have restrained him from going to the rescue. As it was, he lay still, and had the satisfaction, a moment later, of seeing the door open, while the dark figures of the Thugs showed out plain against the starlit sky.

He heard the whispered signal, "*Sweep the floor*," and saw the dark figures take their posts. Govinda had glided to the side of the tent, unseen by the Thugs, and was not in the way of their group.

Now Mirza Ali, who stood at the head of the bed, leaned over and struck Charlton lightly on the forehead. The object was to rouse him from slumber with a start, and make him sit up in a convenient posture for the throwing of the roomal.

Charlton's only answer was a loud snore, under cover of which he raised his pistol.

Khoda Khan stamped his foot.

"Fill the pipe," he whispered, angrily. "Lift the bowl."

Flash! Flash!

The sharp reports of the pistols of Charlton and Govinda roused the whole camp, and by the light of the flash they could see one of the Thugs throw up his arms and fall, while Khoda Khan uttered a yell of pain and fled from the tent, followed by the others.

"You are safe, major," cried Govinda, springing up. "Now see that we get away safely, or this night's work will have a bad ending; for I am Rajah Arjuna, whose life is forfeit in Jag-pore."

As he spoke, they heard the noise of rushing feet coming to the tent. It was the Rajah's guard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RAJAH'S JUSTICE.

MORNING in Jagpore once more, and a horseman comes galloping up to the town gate just as the first rays of the sun are gilding the tops of the minarets.

"Open, you pigs of watchmen!" he shouts, as he strikes his long lance into the woodwork. "His Highness the Rajah is coming, and you are all snoring yet. Open, I say."

The old *naik* or corporal in charge is a superannuated invalid, who hobbles out to unlock the gate in some trepidation, for he knows the voice of Lal Sing, who is notoriously a hard man to oppose.

But Lal Sing this morning looks as if he had some trouble on his mind, for the old *naik* finds him looking back at the country behind him, having evidently forgotten all about his haste.

"What is the matter, lord captain?" asks the old man, in surprise. "I thought that the hunting party would be gone for three or four days at least."

Lal Sing turns a grave face on the gate-keeper.

"He is coming back in great trouble," he responds.

"The Thugs were in our camp last night, and murdered the Sirdar Hamet Khan, with two of our *sowars*, and shot the vizier Khoda Khan, as they fled the place."

"Shot the vizier?" echoes the old man, horrified.

"Yes; he was found bleeding in his tent, and states that a man rushed past him in the dark, just as the great disturbance began; that he tried to stop him, and was shot for his trouble."

"And have they found the villains?" asks the gate-keeper.

"One was killed by the Major Sahib and the rest escaped in the darkness. It is said there was a woman among them; for Sheikh Munnoo, one of our *sowars*, followed her as she fled into the jungle. Then some one struck him on the back of the head, and stunned him so that she escaped."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" ejaculated the corporal. "It was wonderful they did not kill the Rajah."

"His Highness was frightened to death," said Lal Sing. "He had his tent lighted up all the rest of the night, and slept with a ring of guards round him, while the Major Sahib patrolled the camp—Ah, here they come now."

As he spoke he looked back; and, sure enough, the elephants of the Rajah's retinue could be seen coming toward Jagpore by the Residency road.

"The old Sahib Resident will be here to-day and the Rajah is to hold a court of justice," continued Lal Sing, who was now fully embarked on the tide of gossip. "They say the English are determined to hunt out any proofs of Thuggee."

"They will not have far to search," observed the old man, significantly. "The roads near Jagpore have been dangerous for years, and some people have grown rich suddenly."

Lal Sing looked at him sharply.

"Whom do you mean, old man?"

"Oh, my lord captain, I am none to take away the good name of my neighbors; but I see who comes into the town late at night, when reverend moonshes learned in the law, should be asleep in their own houses. Let the Sahib Resident call his witnesses, and Mohun Roy will tell all he knows."

Further conversation was cut off by the sudden and rapid advance of Major Charlton at the head of the *sowars* of the guard, who looked particularly savage and fierce that morning. The men were much excited at the murder of their comrades and the attempt on the life of their idolized chief, and they looked ripe for any act of vengeance and suspicion, the more so that they had been unable to trace any of the Thugs except the dead body, the night before. In their blind rage they had followed Govinda and Luchmee, who were obliged to trust to their speed for escape, despite all of Charlton's appeals to the men to spare them as his preservers. They were in fact like most excitable men of the South, thoroughly demoralized for the night, and it was only the morning that had restored them to something like reason, and quenched their mad desire to kill some one, or any one, to get revenge.

As Charlton rode through the streets, the *sowars* ordered everybody to clear the way; and if the slightest hesitation was evinced, their keen swords were raised in a minute to enforce compliance with the order. Thus the news of the reappearance of the Thugs and the holding of a court of justice spread abroad with great rapidity, and by the time the Rajah had safely entered the palace the city was all astir and full of excitement.

The attempt had been so audacious that its failure had convulsed the society of Jagpore with profound agitation. People abandoned their work to talk over the doings of the Thugs and wonder who would be their next victim. Meantime the retinue of the Rajah was scattered all over the city, and the palace was full of bustle, with preparations for the court of justice.

Sir Douglas McGregor had sent word that he was coming to assist the Rajah with his advice, and Ram Sing had been penetrated with unusual gratitude for the offer, the sensual tyrant being thoroughly frightened out of his wits at the discovery of the three dead bodies so close to his own tent. Of course he knew well enough whence the attempt had come, and had it succeeded in silence the Rajah might have been able to hush it up. As it was, it had failed, and discovery had been so thorough and complete that publicity became absolutely necessary. No wonder the Rajah was disturbed in mind.

As for Khoda Khan, that individual had exhibited traces of consummate genius that night. Pierced through the shoulder by Charlton's bullet, the wily minister had yet managed to escape to his own tent under the cover of the confusion, and to account for his wound on the hypothesis of a col-

lision with the escaped Thug, as Lal Sing had retailed the story to the old gatekeeper. Charlton had not said a word to expose him, for the American was reserving himself for the trial in the morning, and did not wish to warn his foe in advance of the measures he designed to pursue.

So stood matters on that morning when the Resident of Jagpore arrived in state at the gates of the city, mounted on his elephant and surrounded by his servants in their scarlet livery. Sir Douglas, in his plain white linen suit, with the muslin turban round his pith helmet, was the most simply attired person in his whole party, and the contrast between the old Scotchman and his surroundings became still more marked when he entered the court-yard of the palace.

There sat the Rajah on his *musnud*, or throne, under a broad spreading canopy of peacock feathers, with his guards and ministers round him. Charlton had assumed his most splendid uniform, his helmet glittering in the sun like silver, his vest of mail half hidden by a velvet jacket heavily laced with gold, while his Cashmere waist-shawl bristled with weapons. All round him were his faithful *sowars*, gleaming with steel, while the rich embroidered robes of the courtiers, their jewels and plumes, made up a grand picture of Oriental magnificence.

Into the midst of this splendid scene came the heavy and rather vulgar-looking old Scotchman in his simple dress, and in a moment all those stately-jeweled personages were bowing down before the Resident, as the representative of unlimited power.

Sir Douglas bowed slightly in answer to the greeting of the Rajah, and ascended the *musnud*, where an empty chair was placed beside that of the prince.

"May the protection of Brahma, Vishnoo and Seevah hover over the head of my lord, the Resident, this day," said the Rajah, in a tone of courtesy much unlike his usual sulky air. He was completely cowed by the visit of Sir Douglas, coming after the events of the previous night.

"May your Highness enjoy the day," was the response of the old Resident, so dry and formal that the Rajah changed color and started.

Sir Douglas took his seat and continued:

"I hear that your Highness has had advisers; men who have allowed this land to sink into anarchy, contrary to the treaties made with my government. Thugs have been allowed to harbor in Jagpore, when our officers thought Thuggee was stamped out forever."

"It is true, my lord Resident; it is true. But if I can find them out, I will punish them."

The Rajah spoke very humbly, but the Resident's face became sterner than before.

"There has been no attempt made to find out the men who attacked Charlton Sahib only yesterday. Where is the Nautch-girl Luchmee, that was in your palace last night?"

"She escaped," answered the Rajah, sulkily, for he began to resent this hectoring tone before his court.

"Where is the Vizier, Khoda Khan?" pursued the Resident, in the same stern tone.

"He was wounded by the Thugs, last night, and confined to his house."

"Major Charlton," said the old Resident, quietly, "send your best *jimahdar* and a party to bring this Khoda here. He must be interrogated, if we hope for the truth."

"Stay where you are," interrupted the Rajah, angrily. "Whose dog am I that you should obey the orders of another than me? I am the Rajah of Jagpore."

Sir Douglas looked at him steadily a moment from under his bent brows.

"If your Highness assumes that tone I am compelled to remind you that your recognition as Rajah by the East India Company at the time of mutiny has never been formally ratified by the Queen. Does your Highness compel me to retire?"

His tone was full of significance. The Rajah hesitated a moment and then fell back on his chair, saying:

"Go, then, major."

Charlton, who had remained immovable during the brief discussion, gave the necessary orders, which sent off Lal Sing and a dozen *sowars* to arrest the wounded minister. When they were gone, Sir Douglas turned again to the Rajah.

"I am glad to inform your Highness that the Queen has been pleased to announce her intention of relieving the palace of Jagpore from the burden of keeping a turbulent people in order. After to-day, the *sowars* of your Highness's guards will be known as the Jagpore Contingent, and will be paid by the Indian Government, the revenues of Jagpore being administered by me. If your Highness objects to this arrangement, you are free to dismiss the guards entirely, and trust to the affection of the people of Jagpore for your support."

The Rajah had been uneasy when Sir Douglas entered, but he was fast growing more and more frightened.

"And suppose I refuse all this entirely?" he asked.

"In that case, your Highness will have to apply for the recognition of the Government, whose last official dealings with Jagpore were through the medium of Rajah Arjuna."

"But Rajah Arjuna is dead," cried the worried Ram Sing, in a tone of desperation. "He was killed at Delhi, in arms with the mutineers."

"The Governor-General writes me advices that the Rajah Arjuna escaped to Nepal, and is wandering the country disguised as a tiger-tamer, under the name of Govinda," said Sir Douglas, slowly and deliberately.

Ram Sing turned livid and fell back.

"Govinda!—Arjuna!—my brother!" he faintly

ejaculated. "It is impossible. It is a trick, a lie to cheat me of my kingdom."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a great commotion ensued among the guards and courtiers in the court of the palace. The levee was held on a broad piazza that opened on the principal court, with its pavement of tessellated marble and its leaping fountains.

The rabble of the city packed the whole space below the piazza, and now they seemed to be much agitated; for a lane was opening in their midst to permit the passage of some one to the front.

A moment later, the tall form of Rajah Arjuna himself, no longer clad in the mountebank dress that had disguised him so long, but appareled in the armor, velvet and jewels that became his rank, made its appearance before the *musnud*, followed by a buzz from the people. Rajah Arjuna had only this in common with Govinda the tiger-tamer, that he led by their chains Burrhea and Seevah, the former completely quiet and subdued by his recent severe mauling. On the back of Seevah rode the child Ali, placid as ever, while Luchmee followed, in all her combined splendor of beauty and jewels.

The effect of this sudden apparition was startling. The Rajah Ram Sing rose from the *musnud* with a scream of fear and fury, and cried to Charlton:

"Major Sahib, you are false to your salt! You have betrayed me. You saved his life. Seize the traitor!"

Charlton never hesitated a moment after those words.

He drew his sword, called on his men to follow, and advanced on Rajah Arjuna and the tigers as fearlessly as though the beasts had been lambs.

The tigers, apparently confused by the crowd, stood blinking in the sun, and neither of them growled.

Rajah Arjuna smiled as he said:

"You are true to your salt. But suppose I call on my tigers and your guards to follow me, who will be the prisoner then?"

"The tigers will be killed and you with them," answered Charlton, calmly.

In effect he spoke truth. He knew he could depend on his men to the very last, and that the ferocity of Seevah was not so real as it seemed, while the crippled state of Burrhea was plainly perceptible.

"Very well, then, I am your prisoner—for a while," said the returned Rajah, significantly. "You do not intend to oppose the Resident's orders, I hope."

"When he gives them, it is time for me to obey," replied Charlton, and then he advanced, with prisoner, tigers, child and woman, surrounded by the drawn sabers of the *sowars*, to the foot of the *musnud*, just as Lal Sing returned to the court escorting a palkee in which Khoda Khan lay, pale and suffering.

Sir Douglas McGregor hid a grim smile under the iron-gray beard that covered his mouth as he noted Charlton's behavior.

"Well, your Highness," he observed to Ram Sing, "you cannot complain you are not served well by the major. Here is your brother a prisoner. What will you do with him?"

"Strike off his head," answered Ram Sing, instantly. "His life is forfeited to the Company Bahadur for the mutiny."

"It is well," said the Resident, quietly. "He deserves death at our hands, but not at yours. Let us come back to these Thugs. Khoda Khan, they tell me you know something of the villains that murdered the three *sowars* last night."

"So help me Allah, Mohammed, Vishnoo, Seevah and Kalee, Sahib Resident, I tried to stop the man and he shot me," replied the minister, faintly.

"And you never saw him before?" queried the old Scot, calmly.

"Never, my lord, never."

"Major Charlton, who shot Khoda Khan?" demanded Sir Douglas, turning suddenly to the American.

"I did, Sahib Resident, as he was about to seize me in my tent along with his brother Thugs."

There was an instant hush in the court, amid which the sarcastic tones of Sir Douglas were again audible.

"Luchmee, surnamed the Queen of the Nautch-girls, who are the accomplices of this man?"

"The moonshes, Mirza Baba; Tania, the Brahmin, priest of the temple; Bukh Sing, the water-bearer; Moll Roy and Soweylim Khan, the sepoys, and lastly myself," answered the girl, quietly.

"Have you been engaged in any murders with them?"

"In none but the attempt on Charlton Sahib that failed. I was alone, but he was dying when Rajah Arjuna saved us both."

"From what?"

"Him from death, me from murder."

"Who murdered the Sirdar Hamet Khan, last night, if you saw the deed?"

"Mirza Baba threw the *roomal*, Tania and Soweylim were shumsees—holders of hands. Khoda Khan and Mirza Baba were the chief stranglers when the two *sowars* were killed, afterward."

The evidence came amid breathless silence, during which Rajah Ram Sing stared open-mouthed at the Bayadere, dumb with amazed terror.

"Who was with you when you saw this?" pursued the Resident.

"The Rajah Arjuna, who saved the Major Sahib's life. We could not interrupt the Thugs, for we were unarmed."

"Why did you not rouse the *sowars*?"

"We feared they would cut us to pieces in the dark, like fools, to revenge themselves on any one, right or wrong."

"How came you here to-day?"

Luchmee smiled.

"Your excellency should know, since I came from the Residency. Rajah Arjuna brought me there to see your excellency this morning."

"I did bring the woman," corroborated the tiger-tamer. "Now, your Highness perceives that this Khoda Khan, your minister, is a villain worthy of death. What shall be done to him?"

"He must die, of course," faltered the Rajah. "I knew not of this before."

"He lies," screamed Khoda Khan, rendered desperate by the danger in which he stood. "He is our chief and ordered the death of the Major Sahib."

The wounded minister writhed up on his elbow to say this, and fell back exhausted, when the Rajah turned angrily:

"Cut the dog to pieces," he ejaculated. "Whose dog am I to listen to this from my own servants?"

"Take him away," said Sir Douglas, quietly, to the *sowars*. "Put him in the guard-house, major, and clear the court. Our justice is over. More is to follow."

Charlton obeyed the order in a manner that told of a previous rehearsal with Sir Douglas, and the *sowars* drove all the people out of the gate of the palace, which was locked upon them.

Then when all had left the palace but the rival Rajahs, the old Resident turned to Arjuna and said:

"The Queen's government is anxious to have good order in Jagpore, and to that end has pardoned you. Do you think you can drive out your brother and his guards from this palace?"

"If the English will not interfere," said Arjuna, proudly, "I will be master before sunset."

"Very good," replied the Scot, coolly. "The Queen will not interfere, but will put you out into the city and leave the Rajah and the American Sahib in the palace. Are you satisfied?"

"I am," rejoined Arjuna.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

AN hour later the city of Jagpore was all in a ferment of excitement. The news of the return of Rajah Arjuna had spread in the bazars, and one of the old-time Jagpore rebellions was at once inaugurated. Sir Douglas McGregor, true to his word, had left the palace, taking Arjuna with him, and had unconcernedly gone to the Residency, leaving the rival claimants to the throne to fight it out alone.

As he left the palace, the gates were barred and guarded, the troopers of the guard turned out to assume their new duties as artillery men, and matters quickly assumed an aspect such as Charlton had not seen since the first year of his life at Jagpore. His training of the guards had been so perfect that the moral influence of their appearance had hitherto kept the people down, but now the case was different. The people had adored the memory of the Rajah Arjuna in the past, and his return had operated like an electric shock to nerve them to resistance against their oppressor, the tyrant Ram Sing.

Charlton felt little interest in the result of the conflict beyond the determination to be "true to his salt." The Rajah had treated him so vilely that, could he have resigned his post with honor, and left the fat villain to fight his own battles, he would have done so. But it was not in the nature of a soldier like Charlton to abandon the worst of masters to destruction; and he knew well that, were he to forsake the Rajah, every man of the *sowars* would desert to Arjuna. As it was, he knew they were more or less disaffected, for there was something in the fame of Arjuna, even if of twenty years ago, that was very captivating to them.

He went all round the fortifications and set things in order, saw that the guns were loaded and trained on the town, and awaited hostilities. He did not wish to provoke them by a wanton and barbarous cannonade in behalf of a villain, and only kept up the semblance of defense, to gain better terms for his master.

As he passed through the guard-room of the palace after his return from one of his tours of inspection, he noticed that the litter of Khoda Khan had been left there, and that the wounded vizier, pale and exhausted, lay in it. It reminded him strongly of Khoda's malicious pursuit, and he said:

"What had I done to you, Khoda Khan, that you should wish to kill me?"

"It was the *goor*, the drink of Kalee," muttered the wounded man in husky tones. "We cannot help being Thugs and drawing others in with us if we have drank the *goor*. You are safe, now, for Kalee has punished us for disobeying the omen that told us not to harm you."

"And where are your comrades?" asked Charlton.

"Here in this palace," whispered Khoda. "They will make you thank them before long, and make you a rich man."

"What do you mean?" he asked, startled.

"You will see before long. Hark! the city is up."

The sound of tomtoms booming through the streets, with the clang of cymbals and the firing of guns told that the people of Jagpore were coming to attack the palace, and that it was time for the American to go to his post.

Forgetting all about Thugs in his military duties, Charlton rushed out to the gates, mounted a tower, and beheld a huge motley crowd of people crowding to the attack, firing their clumsy matchlocks at the walls and shouting loudly. Presently there came a

hush, as a body of horsemen rode out of the crowd, headed by Rajah Arjuna himself, and came boldly up to the gates where their leader struck his lance into the woodwork till it rung again, and called out with a loud voice:

"Where is Major Charlton, the commander of the guards of the Rajah of Jagpore?"

"I am here," answered the American, showing himself on the walls. "What would you?"

"I demand that you surrender this place to me, the rightful Rajah of Jagpore. If you open the gates at once, I will see that you continue in your office. You know I am the true Rajah and that my younger brother usurped my place."

"I know nothing but my duty, and I must do it," answered the young soldier firmly. "While the Rajah Ram Sing lives, I must be true to my salt."

"Where is he now, think you?" asked Arjuna, in a significant tone.

"In his zenanah under the protection of my guards," responded Charlton.

"You are wrong," retorted the Rajah, sharply. "He is my prisoner by this time, and your castle is taken. Hark!"

Charlton started, for he became aware of a dull clamor within the walls of the palace, growing louder and mingled with the clash of arms.

Arjuna laughed as he saw his face change.

"You forgot the secret passage," he said. "Your citadel is full of the enemy, and if you do not surrender the lives of the garrison are forfeit."

Charlton looked down into the court-yard and saw that the Rajah spoke truth. His men were indeed flying from the interior in confusion.

"Promise me my master's life and liberty, and I will surrender," he cried, desperately. "Refuse and I cut my way out with my *sowars*. They will follow."

"I promise," answered Arjuna, and then the American hurried down to the gate, and opened it just as the party, sent by the secret passage, and led by Kalidasa the Brahmin, came running into the court.

A moment later, Rajah Arjuna rode into the palace of his ancestors, gained without the loss of a single life, and issued his orders:

"Take no lives, but bring my brother, Ram Sing, before me at once."

He took his seat on the same *musnud* before which he had lately been brought as a prisoner, and turned to Charlton with all the ease of an old friend, saying in English:

"Your defense would have been excellent, major, had you remembered the passage. I must have it stopped up by the by. It might be dangerous some day, now that it is so well known. I hope you will continue to lead my guards as well as you have those of my brother, for you are not English."

As he spoke several men came running into the court from the palace as if excited, crying:

"Ram Sing! Ram Sing is dead!"

Charlton turned reproachfully to the new Rajah. "You have deceived me. You promised me his life."

"And as the heavens stand, my men have not killed him," said Arjuna, excitedly. "Who has done this?"

His words were checked on his lips by the entrance of a singular procession. Old Mirza Baba, no longer in moonshoe robes, but stripped for his devilish Thuggee work, stalked proudly ahead, dangling from his right hand the consecrated pick-ax of Kalee, while behind him came eight men similarly stripped and carrying two bodies, four to each body.

One of these bodies was that of Khoda Khan, the other that of the Rajah Ram Sing, and both bore the swollen and distorted features that told of death by strangulation.

Mirza Baba advanced to the foot of the *musnud*, bowing and cringing, and prostrated himself.

"Great Ram Arjuna Sing, Rajah of Rajahs and Lord of Lords," he said, "behold the tribute of the Goddess of Kalee to your Resplendency. They were your foes, and behold they are no more. Kalee sends her servants to ask for their reward."

"And by the head of Brahma you shall have it," cried Arjuna, furiously. "Wretches that ye were, did ye think to bribe me to tolerate Thuggee by the murder of my brother? Carry them away and hang them from the battlements, and thus perish all Thugs."

In a twinkling the *sowars* had seized them, and only the excellent discipline of Charlton saved the Thugs from being burned alive. As it was, their bodies were hung above the gate to terrify any future Thugs, and Jagpore was at peace at last.

We have but little to add to our story now, for our readers can guess the rest. Rajah Arjuna Sing has made his peace with the British Government, and reigns in Jagpore to-day, while Charlton is his chief of horse. Luchmee has gone back to Delhi to resume her career as Queen of the Nautch-girls, and has dropped the perilous practice of Thuggee forever. Little Ali continues to improve in stature, and Burthea has recovered his health and become quite tame. Rajah Arjuna roams the jungle no more, but he often says that he never was happier than when he was only known as

THE TIGER-TAMER.

THE END.

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